Marxism Today

May 1987 95p

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Trade Wars
Alliance Assessed
Jews
The Gorbachev Effect
Glenys Kinnock
Chernobyl and Britain

Eric Hobsbawm: There is only one way of defeating the Thatcher government. It is by voting for the candidate who is best placed to keep out the

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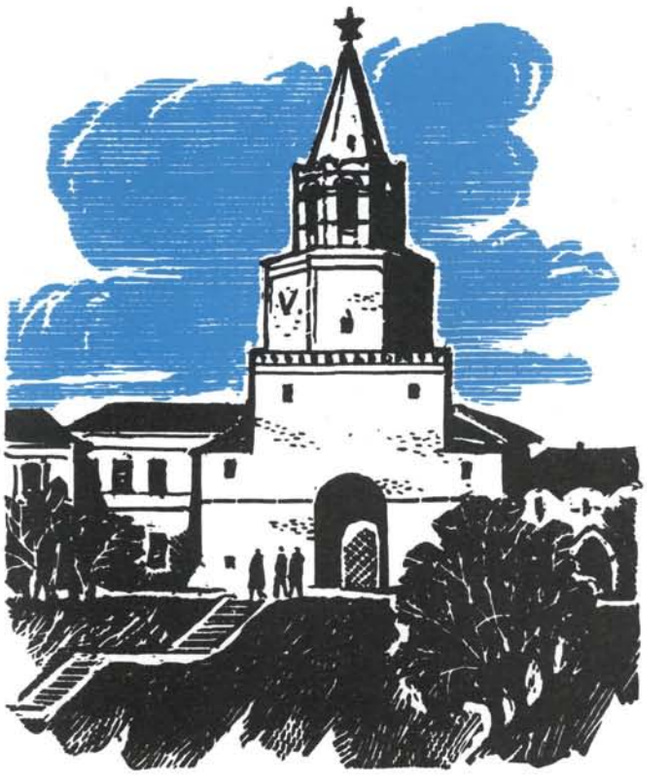
THE FAR HORIZONS



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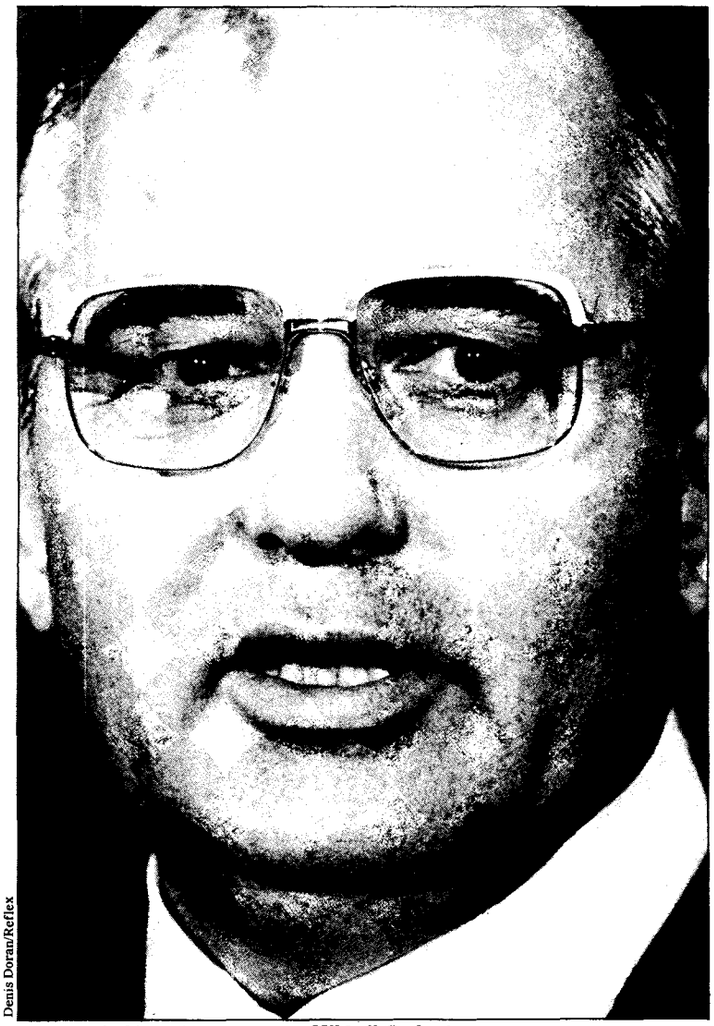

Denis Doran/Reflex

Man of the moment: Mikhail Gorbachev

The Red Star Effect

The dramatically warm and open reception given to Mrs Thatcher by Mikhail Gorbachev surprised many Western observers. Why would the woman whom Moscow once dubbed 'the Iron Lady' be accorded 50 minutes of free time on Soviet television and several hours of tête-à-tête talks in the Kremlin, when it was clear before her visit that on arms control she had come with nothing to offer? Other Western European leaders had preceded Mrs Thatcher to Moscow since Mr Gorbachev came to power – François Mitterrand of France and Felipe Gonzalez of Spain.

Like her, Mr Mitterrand had chatted to Soviet citizens on a 'walk-about', in his case in Red Square, and had come out with flattering comments about Gorbachev the man. Like her, Mr Mitterrand was planning a trip to Tbilisi in Georgia, but cancelled it because Mr Gorbachev wanted even more time for their talks. In a rare gesture of friendship Mr Gorbachev and his wife, Raisa, went sightseeing with the Mitterrands to the Soviet astronauts' training camp.

Mrs Thatcher's visit was not as much of a breakthrough as the typically insular sections of the British media made out. Nevertheless, it was given greater prominence by the Soviets themselves for one basic reason. Mrs Thatcher was the first conservative Western leader and the first exponent of traditional cold war thinking to be Mr Gorbachev's guest. In a sense, she was the only available one around.

Chancellor Kohl of West Germany leads a country which the Soviets certainly consider a more important economic power than Britain, and one with which they are looking for greatly expanded trade and financial deals, including joint ventures. But Mr Kohl blotted his political copybook last year with his crass comparison of Mr Gorbachev's 'public relations style' with that of Goebbels – a remark which revealed both his insensitivity to German history and to the reality of what Mr Gorbachev is trying to do.

President Reagan is not due for a Moscow visit, for protocol reasons and because the fractious state of US-Soviet relations and the overloaded superpower agenda still leave a third summit in doubt. In any case, after two meetings, Mr Gorbachev is disappointed that cold war thinking still dominates the White House.

By contrast with her two conservative Western colleagues Mrs Thatcher is clean. She is also intelligent, and to a man as intellectually alive and innovative as Mr Gorbachev, she must be – let's face it – fun. The very fact that the two of them actually had little business to do together – in spite of Mrs Thatcher's much-quoted 'I can do business with him' – must have made their talks all the cheerier.

In the dreary bargaining, careful enunciation of prepared positions, and polite banality which characterise so much of the intercourse during visits by foreign heads of government, one cannot discount the attraction of breaking loose once in a while into a good old intellectual ding-dong. Mrs Thatcher enjoys that sort of thing, and obviously warmed to it even more in the climate of open give-and-take which Mr Gorbachev provided.

There was a revealing moment in her Soviet television interview when she interrupted one of the Soviet journalists who was mentioning 'the advantages of the socialist system'. 'Would you please say what they meant? You tossed out a quite provocative comment. What do you think are the advantages of a socialist society?' she asked.

On Mr Gorbachev's side just as much as on Mrs Thatcher's, the visit was part entertainment, and part a glorious show. Its purpose, however, was not to ensure Mrs Thatcher's re-election, whatever the Tory press may say. It had a considerably larger context. The strategy was to defuse the cold war anti-Soviet propaganda of the Western hawks in general, and in particular to get a conservative Western endorsement of the Gorbachev reform programme, knocking on the head the argument that a stronger Soviet Union is a more dangerous one.

'I believe it is in the interests of the West to have a higher standard of living in the Soviet Union', Mrs Thatcher said at her Moscow press conference. In this she ran directly counter to the hard line argument that a Western initiated arms race, and especially the Star Wars programme, are good news because they will cripple the Soviet economy in its attempts to catch up.

No wonder that one commentator on Soviet television exulted: 'Some of the mass media in Britain have been too hasty in their conclusions that the present social and economic reforms will simply make Russia a fitter fighter. The prime minister showed the media a good example of genuine interest and this is the first serious assessment of what is going on in the Soviet Union by a Western leader'.

Using the enormous public interest aroused in the West

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by the new processes underway in the Soviet Union – the so-called Gorbachev effect – the Soviet aim is to ensure that Mrs Thatcher's comment is not the polite courtesy of a visitor, but a genuinely held argument which she will use in Washington, London, and Bonn. A secondary Gorbachev aim in defusing the old notion of a 'Soviet threat' is to prevent the emergence of a new Western European military entity, if and when the Americans start to reduce their presence in Europe over the next decade.

Times have changed since the days when Khrushchev started a similar reform programme in the Soviet Union. Unlike Khrushchev, Mr Gorbachev is not being militarily provocative or aggressively anti-capitalist in his ideological boasts. This gives him a real chance to win the Western public and particularly its opinion-formers away from the language of anti-Soviet sabre-rattling, or at least to make such talk seem hollow and irrelevant.

What will all this mean for socialists in the West? It is hard to say. Any effort to make the Soviet Union a more democratic and efficient society must be helpful to socialism in a long-range and rather unquantifiable way, although conservatives will of course insist that it is the abandonment of socialism which is making the Soviet Union more human, as they have already been saying about China's reform programme.

It is easier to see the benefits of the Gorbachev factor for peace. Prejudice about socialism will die harder than prejudice about Soviet foreign policy. Here there is a stronger prospect of a gradual shift in the climate of East-West confrontation in Europe. Talk of a 'Euro-bomb' and a joint Anglo-French-West German nuclear strategy must have a better chance of being overcome as people see that even Mrs Thatcher is prepared to recognise that Mr Gorbachev means what he says about arms control.●

Jonathan Steele

Marketing Masterpieces

Art, in particular old masters and impressionist paintings, has long been considered a sound and solid investment, virtually guaranteed by an art market to be maintained and increase in value. In the past six months prices have rocketed sky high. The Windsor jewels went for £31m, nearly 10 times their estimate. Fortunately the Pasteur Institute's Aids research will benefit. The sale of Van Gogh's 'Sunflowers' for £25m in March demonstrates how art as an international commodity has caught the attention of 'new money'.

Several factors contribute to this phenomenon. The commodity is finite: there is a known, limited quantity. The pedigree of the art work must be faultless – fakes undermine confidence. The few 'old masters' which come on the market command attention – and a high price.

Dealer power plays a large part in this. The rising price of art, and its increased investment value, has provoked dealers to ensure authenticity and to 'buy-in' works that come up at auction which do not reach the desired price. These are later released at a suitable time, often with additional stamps of academic approval.

Dealer power was much in evidence in the recent British Art Exhibition at the Royal Academy. Any artists favoured by dealers were over-represented. Cork Street, the market place of 'new art', is currently in the doldrums, overtaken by a staunch conservatism.

The most fickle factor however, is that of 'new money' and international finance. The boom in the stock market has been worldwide, and huge fortunes have been made. The overseas buyer of 'Sunflowers' preferred to remain anonymous, while the wildly-inflated prices paid for the Windsor trinkets also came from buyers all over the world. 'New money' flows free in Japan, America and in this country, sometimes in the direction of art.

The Japanese are particularly keen on impressionist work, seeing in it oriental influence, a section of Western art to be colonised. In America the Getty Museum has vast sums to spend every year, otherwise lost in tax. In this country Doris and Charles Saatchi and the Sainsburys are regular patrons of the arts; Alan Sugar of Amstrad is also extremely wealthy with 'new money'. For the wealthy few, buying 'Sunflowers' would have presented little financial problem.

'Sunflowers' was offered by the owners to the nation: alas it could not afford it. The people will also be the losers when the BR Pension Fund puts its art collection on the market. Much of it is currently on show in public collections (where it is cared for and insured) but on current sale prices none will be in a position to purchase. ●

Emmanuel Cooper

Mega prices: van Gogh's 'Sunflowers' sets a world record price at Christie's

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Revolt Of The White Coats

If new grants for university research groups had been frozen a year ago, the political costs would almost certainly have been bearable. But this year, when the five research councils which make such grants in the natural and social sciences cut off new work, they quickly got £15m from education minister Kenneth Baker to add to the £650m science budget for 1987/88.

This small victory is one sign of the increasing political visibility of research and development, brought about largely by scientists themselves. The theme that the British government is undermining the nation's research base has been taken up recently by an all-party select committee of the House of Lords, by a series of campaigning articles in *The Times*, and by the government's own science advisers in the shape of the advisory board for the research councils.

But much of the groundwork was laid by the recently-formed group of researchers who call themselves Save British Science (SBS).

For SBS, the grants freeze added insult to the injuries of years of underfunding. It arose because the Department of Education and Science paid for a new salary package for university academics, but took no account of the costs research councils would bear paying for temporary staff on the same scales. Whether this was a deliberate ploy by DES civil servants, or Mr Baker himself, to squeeze more cash from the Treasury remains obscure. But the £15m announced on All Fools Day will cover the bill.

Even in an election year, the speed of response is surprising. Before, it would have been possible to hold the line by pointing to the overall size of the science budget. Academic scientists' willingness to threaten the end of civilization every time a few grants are refused can as easily harm as help their cause. And the Tories do not seem to have suffered greatly from their long-standing disdain for the intellectual community which sustains higher education and research, the block on Mrs Thatcher's honorary Oxford degree notwithstanding.

The missing link is that the science lobby has fostered a new awareness of the importance of basic research for future industry. If British science needs to be saved from an uncaring government, it needs to be saved for its contribution to high technology growth in the 21st century. This plausible, though unprovable, argument is sustaining science budgets in other countries. It is now beginning to help those trying to increase ours.

However, the current debate does not go beyond this general thrust to probe further who the research is for, and how priorities should be chosen. On the whole, SBS would be happy to see grants allocated solely by scientists, and research for application and development selected by companies as proxies for the market. This is only one possible route to economic and social benefit. A separate strand of discussion within government, industry, and the research community has been how to spot 'exploitable areas of science'. In a country that only does about 5% of world research and development, this selection is at least as important as levels of funding.

As SBS brings together threatened scientists from all disciplines, from physiology to particle physics, it is hard to see them pursuing a discussion about priorities very far, beyond a general scepticism about the merits of Britain's £2 billion a year defence R & D programme. A more pointed discussion of research priorities will await separate political initiatives from outside the scientific community. ●

Jon Turney

Gays Step Up Pressure

Gay activism has risen in the last few years, yet the recent Aids crisis has prompted an anti-gay backlash, given expression by the far Right and the media, which is finding a resonance in people's fears and prejudices. Although gay response has become more organised and effective, there is no coherent national movement to give a focus for action.

Against this background the Legislation for Lesbian and Gay Rights Campaign (LLGRC) was formed last summer. It aims to challenge the notion running through British law and social policy that homosexuality is against 'public morality', and to get new legislation passed. LLGRC is broad-based, involving any individual (including heterosexuals) or group who supports its aims. Its first major conference on May 23, will consider drawing up a bill, to contain a general anti-discrimination clause, as well as specific reforms such as the inheritance laws, granting of custody to lesbian mothers and the gay male age of consent.

Rights campaigns are already part of a tradition in this country; the Sex Discrimination Act, Equal Pay Act and Race Relations Act were all passed through pressure of sectional demands. However, the poor impact of these acts shows that the winning of reforms does not of itself change the power structure upon which a particular oppression rests.

So perhaps the real political potential of the LLGRC lies in two areas: firstly the opportunity to shift attitudes in the heterosexual population by raising the level of debate around what is 'legitimate' sexual activity; and secondly, the opportunity to build a national movement uniting around basic demands. ●

Kathryn Harriss

Baa-Baa Zapped Sheep

A year has passed since fallout from the Chernobyl cloud contaminated grazing in northern Britain with radioactive caesium, but the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food (MAFF) is still finding high levels in sheep and expects this year's lambs to be born contaminated too.

The prospect of long-term damage to livestock has provoked an angry reaction from Cumbrian farmers, traditionally neither quick to grumble nor eager to criticise the nuclear industry, with Sellafield, the county's biggest and most powerful employer in their midst. Indeed, a rumour that contamination originated not from the USSR but from BNFL has gained considerable credence in a community not noted for its gullibility.

Tests have shown the caesium bears the special 'footprint' of Chernobyl – twice as much caesium 137 as caesium 134. But though the facts don't support the rumour, farmers have good reason to feel suspicious of the nuclear industry and judge it guilty because of its close association with MAFF and the 'independent' advisory body, the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB). For both let them down badly over the whole Chernobyl affair. Ironically, the nuclear barons are this time innocent.

The original ban on move-

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Steve Benbow/Network

Cumbrian crisis: the sheep that fell victim of Chernobyl

ment and slaughter of sheep, imposed two months after the Chernobyl rain, was expected to last just three weeks, after which time the minister 'firmly believed' the caesium would disappear. But a year on, MAFF is showing more realism, and a letter in February to farmers in the still restricted areas acknowledges that some lambs will be born above the 1000 bequerels per kilo 'action' level, at which meat is judged unfit for human consumption.

The Ministry's extreme reluctance to impose a ban – which resulted in some dangerously radioactive meat slipping through the net – was matched only by its reluctance to set out a clear compensation scheme. Today, sheep on the Cumbrian fells can be found marked blue, red or apricot: each colour representing a different attempt at damage limitation and testimony to the Ministry's failure to forecast how long the ban would last. Most farmers feel they have incurred extra expenses and losses from hanging on to stock, both alive and dead. Some think the most prudent policy would have been to destroy all contaminated stock, thus avoiding any genetic hazard which may arise in the future.

A year on from Chernobyl, the NRPB, responsible for advising the Ministry and assessing the direct impact of the incident on the human population, has also changed its tune. The Board now admits it never foresaw the possibility of a large contaminated air mass. Equally surprising, it had to calculate the 'action' level for lamb from scratch.

In the light of the accident the Board is now prepared to offer more localised advice, even when the affected area is large. This is an important change in policy; had it been applied at the time to northern areas of the UK, it might have lessened the 500 cancer cases predicted throughout the UK by Dr Barrie Lambert of St Bartholomew's Hospital Medical School, especially if dietary precautions had been added to the ban on drinking rainwater.

The final insult to Cumbrians came in April from the DHSS. They have rejected a call from Cumbria county council for a programme of health monitoring on the local population following Chernobyl. Cumbrian farmers may be wrong in suspecting their caesium contamination came from BNFL. But they are right to conclude that the spirit of official scientific inquiry is not on their side. ●

Ruth Balogh

Britain Cries Foul

Michael Howard – junior minister at the Department of Trade – had a rather disappointing trip to Tokyo last month. An agreement on financial regulations was signed but Mr Howard failed to win the admission of British finance houses to the Japanese stock exchange which was one main reason for his journey. His other task was to secure a telecommunications contract for Cable and Wireless, overseas arm of Mercury, the rival by appointment to privatised British Telecom. Here Mr Howard may have had more success, although the deal is not finalised and Cable and Wireless seem unlikely to get as big a slice of the pie as they had hoped.

Mr Nakasone's ministers showed themselves unmoved by a British government campaign of unprecedented stridency. Mrs Thatcher, Sir Geoffrey Howe and other cabinet ministers coupled denunciations of Japan's supposedly protected home market with unusually explicit threats of retaliation. Obviously, however, Britain does not have the same clout as the US which has recently pressured the Japanese into major trade concessions, notably a guaranteed share of their semiconductor market for the troubled US electronics industry.

The Reagan and Thatcher administrations are exercised over Japan's huge trade surplus. This was over $80 billion last year and is likely to be around the same in 1987, in spite of a rapidly appreciating yen.

British trade negotiators tend to suggest that this surplus – largely earned in the US and Western Europe, especially Britain – is itself evidence of unfair trading practices. The implicit assumption is that international trade will be self-balancing if only everyone plays by the rules of free competition.

In reality, no mechanism exists to bring about automatic current account balance. The persistent trade surplus of Japan, like that of West Germany, is a long-term reflection of the continuing lead which Japanese companies have in their industrial systems and manufactured products. The surplus could and should be reduced and controlled by the right macroeconomic policies: expansion in Japan, a reduction in the huge US government deficit and, most importantly, refinance and accelerated

Frank Spooner Pictures

Trade war: American goods for sale in a Tokyo store

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Current account trade balances of some OECD countries (in US$ billion)

	1983	1985	1986	1987*
United States	–46.6	–117.7	–138.0	–136.5
Japan	20.8	49.2	81.7	77.2
Germany	4.1	13.2	32.5	26.2
United Kingdom	4.8	4.6	–0.3	–4.7

Source: OECD Economic Outlook, December 1986
*1986 and 1987 are based on preliminary estimates and forecasts.

development of the debt-hampered economies of the Third World.

But no reforms in the Japanese home market will make a major contribution to the correction since the problem is no longer Japanese trade barriers so much as the West's lack of excellent, low-cost products to compete on the Japanese market with the goods they can make for themselves.

From the exalted point of view of pure and upright free trade the Japanese seem more sinned against than sinning. For the last decade their manufactured exports to the US and the EEC have been restricted by 'voluntary' export restraint (VER) agreements which may stay just within the letter of international trade treaties while clearly violating their spirit. These VERs put ceilings on both total Japanese sales and on their market shares for specific products. Britain, for example, currently limits Japanese car sales in just this way. Although the US recently allowed its VER with Japan to lapse, the agreement it reached on semiconductors is essentially protectionist, imposing minimum prices to safeguard uncompetitive US producers.

Both the US and the EEC resort continuously to 'anti-dumping' procedures to delay and hamper Japanese low-cost products. At present, only Western official obstruction and delay is holding back a new wave of digital tape audio systems destined for the same success as previous generations of Japanese consumer electronics. It is likely that a thorough-going implementation of free trade would not shrink the Japanese surplus but increase it.

Meanwhile the surplus exists and must be managed since only smooth and continuous recycling (through loans and investments) of Japan's export revenues maintains stability in the Western financial systems.

The British government's demands for concessions in banking and stockbroking ignore this underlying necessity while displaying a typically Thatcherite fetish of 'financial services'. If you have $80 billion to lend you are hardly likely to put it all through someone else's bank so that they can cream off all the fees and commissions. The fastest growing banks in London and other financial centres have been Japanese simply because they are the ones with all the money. The threat to exclude the Japanese from the City is bluster: if a couple of Japanese banks actually departed for Frankfurt or Paris, Robin Leigh-Pemberton would soon be making anguished phone calls to Whitehall.

Because they take a more sober view of economic relations with Japan, the trade ministers of the EEC have refused to endorse the British offensive. Less concerned with financial dealing, more interested in industrial regeneration, continental governments want long-term collaboration with Japanese companies to obtain technology, employment and improved balance of payments figures.

Nevertheless, the flag-waving frenzy of the government may not be completely miscalculated. It might fail to move the Japanese but it is also, of course, designed to give the British electorate a display of vigorous national self-assertion. ●

John Grahl

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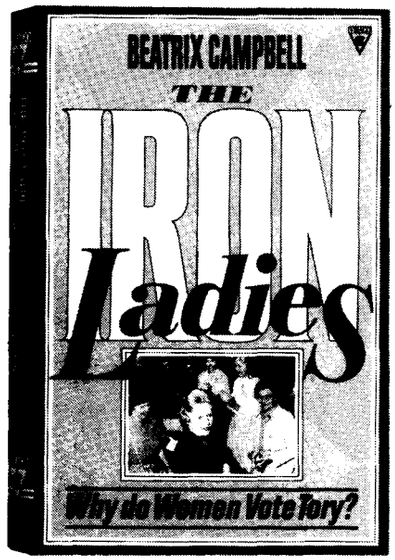

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State Of The Union

Hardly has the incumbent of the general secretaryship of the Transport and General Workers Union been in place for five minutes and the battle to find his successor has already begun. If there is political substance to the power struggle currently rocking the union then it is well hidden – there is widespread reluctance to see the problem as more than personality and pique. But tantrums can't explain the destabilisation of such an institution.

The power struggle, apparently, does not extend to the most important political initiative taken by the union for years, the 'Link-up' campaign, which originates with the broad Left but enjoys consensual support across all the factions in the union. The realignment to the right on the union's executive is believed by many people to be nothing much to do with politics, and everything to do with personalities. But when we reflect on the meaning of the 'Link-up' campaign it becomes clear that the outcome of the power struggle could determine the future not only of 'Link-up' but of the union.

'Link-up' is the union's great sweep into territory where trade unions have hitherto feared to tread, the campaign to recruit thousands of part-time, temporary and seasonal workers, most of them women.

Having ignored these workers as being somehow not 'real' workers, the union is redeeming a long overdue responsibility to do what it was set up to do, to organise the disorganised and the 'dispossessed'. It is returning to its roots and doing not only the necessary thing (if it is to recover from the membership haemorrhage of the last decade) but the honourable thing.

More than that, in the absence of a strategy for renewal from the Right or the old sectarian Left in the union, 'Link-up' is the first unifying and relevant initiative from the new leadership. It should have happened two, not to say 25, years ago.

But it's happened now and represents a break with both left sectarianism and with right inertia – if the political authority of Morris and Todd has been challenged over recent months by polarised politicking in the union, then this is exactly the stuff to consolidate a new consensus.

'Link-up', and the other more tentative attempts to modernise the union depend on the union's ability to put resources where they have never been put before – primarily at the disposal of poor women – to abandon a cost-benefit approach to recruitment, to sustain and nourish the membership by developing the union's infrastructure in a period of contraction, and finally to contemplate the transformation of the union's political and industrial objectives. A union which is commodious to part-time bar staff, factory workers on flexitime and hospital cleaners is not the same thing as a union wrought in the image of lorry drivers and dockers.

More than 500 union officials are being required to take to the streets for this recruitment campaign, targeting particular towns, researching their labour markets and local employers, sending in teams to organise.

It sounds wonderful, and it is, but it also demands trade unionism *in depth*, a sophisticated infrastructure designed not only to defend workers with many needs, but also to develop a trade union culture where there is none. Can the union follow through?

Among activists there is an atmosphere both of hope and foreboding. 'You know what trade union recruitment is about,' said one woman active in the campaign, 'it's about cost benefit – only the Left understands the long-term political benefit. This campaign won't bring in lots of money for the union, but it will bring something new into the union and to its political priorities.' Her region is in the north where initiatives have already been taken to organise casual staff in the catering industry.

'Our region is organising more and more education for women, but it can't be treated in cost benefit terms. We've had to be very careful to keep our recruitment numbers up to justify the effort. We need lots of back-up in terms of officers and services, research and education. For example the union hasn't really got into the campaign to defend maternity rights, but that's exactly what matters to young women part-timers. It hasn't really got into social security campaigns, but that's exactly what matters to seasonal or temporary workers. What we need is a good research structure that's thinking about what the members need and not just what the union needs.'

And in a southern region another activist complains that although some good work has begun on education, a key element in the new politics, some officials seem to think it is optional rather than integral. 'Even now I hear doubts being expressed about whether it's worth the money.'

He felt energised by the new campaign precisely because it was an appropriate challenge from the Left to the business unionism of the new Right in the labour movement. 'We're aiming for the workers not the employers. The Right in the trade unions is also going for a re-think, but their approach is to study the market, jump on a plane to Japan and get to the employers before there's even a workforce.

'Our anchor is the workers, we're not into selling labour to the employers before the workers have had a chance to have a say, and divorcing people from their union. The real crux is that the labour market has changed – there aren't 25m workers with union cards poking up their nostrils and the *Daily Herald* poking out of their back pocket.'

Both of these are local working class activists – they are where the change is. And both of them fear that the qualitative, as against quantitative, implications of the new initiatives won't be protected if the Todd – Morris – Prosser axis is undermined. The implications are nothing less than the transformation of the union, and they were spelled out at the Wembley conference launching the 'Link-up' campaign earlier this year.

Can the Transport and General create a new culture of solidarity in opposition to the renewal of craft hierarchy which is being organised in the new business unionism? The humanisation of this great union must also be part of its modernisation – the union has to be a place in which some of the poorest and most put-upon can feel at home. A culture of equality, democracy and worldliness must displace the old 'masculine intuition' which has described its political practice for decades.

Infrastructure is inseparable from the birth of a new culture within the union to support the new membership, but also from the development of a much wider range of individual services for members – British trade unionism is massively present in society and yet massively absent from daily life.

'It is returning to its roots and doing not only the necessary thing (if it is to recover from the membership haemorrhage of the last decade) but the honourable thing'

The old intuitions which guided the TGWU relied in part on the union's grandeur within the labour movement and on the *sexual snobbery* of 'the lads' who thought they were somebody because they were if not the best then the biggest trade union in Britain. Or as someone who's worked with the union put it, 'the style of the past was: we're the lads, all we need to do is get the boots on and give them a good hiding. Macho militancy. It was a belief that

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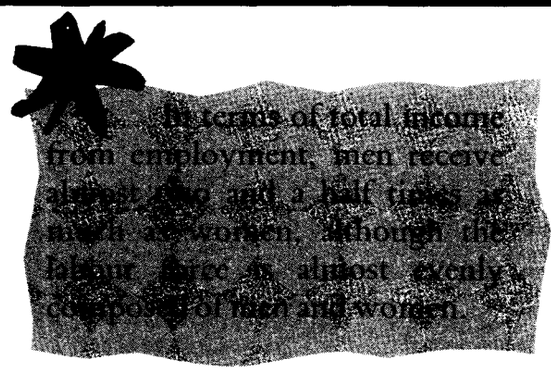
MAYDAY GREETINGS FROM THE GMB – WORKING FOR A LABOUR VICTORY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aggression was all you needed.'

That belief, which has particularly informed the Left of the union, has taken a terrible battering in the 1980s: with some remarkable exceptions there is little stomach for industrial insurgency in the Transport and General these days. You can't get a strike for love nor money. That's making some people wonder just what the Left must do to rival the offerings of the opposition: the pendulum arbitration, sweetheart deals and 'personal services' of the new right unionism.

It also took a battering during the miners strike when the union, despite the good intentions of its leadership,

'We're the lads, all we need to do is get the boots on and give them a good hiding. Macho militancy. It was a belief that aggression was all you needed'

could not deliver 'the lads' to the picket lines. Not even creative accounting by tellers at mass meetings worked any more to bounce members into solidarity strikes.

The renovation of the union depends on the creation of a new infrastructure, a new democracy and a new culture in the union. Members recruited during the early stages of 'Link-Up' will not immediately enjoy the benefits of collective bargaining or even union recognition, and that makes sophisticated servicing both individually and collectively vital to sustain the new membership.

Democracy will be the condition of a new culture, in which members need to feel that not only do they belong to the union, but that it belongs to them, that it welcomes their participation, that trade unionism is a space in which they can realise themselves, and that it is relevant to their world. This isn't just rhetoric – many of the targeted type of members have never been *welcomed* before by the Transport and General.

Democracy matters more and more: not just because it is the high ground taken by Thatcherism. The Left in the union was not sufficiently differentiated from the electoral practices of the Right – it is a mark of the Left's neglect of democracy that Todd, to his great credit, had to fend off his allies' resistance to a re-run of his contested election.

More than that, it matters because, as a London activist put it, 'the Left hasn't yet fought for positive democratic rights – if the union is going to be democratic then we have to have positive rights and facilities in the workplace to take part in debates and in ballots.'

An organiser of low paid and part-time workers in another union, who's been watching the Transport and General's initiative with both pleasure and trepidation, reckoned 'this kind of work takes meticulous patience, money and an attitude of mind. It also needs what they haven't yet got – an ability to see their own methods and attitudes as part of the problem. Then there's the way some things aren't seen as legitimate – organising a bingo session isn't real trade unionism because people who play bingo aren't real trade unionists. Or learning different languages and standing outside a mosque to recruit people. And have they got a strategy to deal with the employers' agenda?'

The new unionism doesn't yet describe the Transport and General – it's a declaration of intent, it's the union saying hello to the future, but it may yet be the prisoner of its own past. Despite the present consensus around 'Link-up' the initiative could still be extinguished by the power struggle taking place within the union, in which the broad Left is challenged by a curious coalition of the Right and exiles from the broad Left, a coalition rooted in centralism and in macho militancy. Perhaps faced with the future these old sparring partners feel happier with each other and their shared past.

There's something peculiarly patriarchal in these men which makes the alliance between bruisers from the left and the right corners less unlikely. And it finds an echo in the claustrophobic caucus surrounding Neil Kinnock in the shadow cabinet, who want the party to stop messing about with gays and peaceniks and all those strangers to This Great Movement of Ours.

Both sides are mirrors of each other, narcissistic, narrow-minded men who smugly dismiss the new agenda without seeing that its themes consume the imagination of millions of people. As a friend reminded me the other day, to find out what working people's agenda is today watch *EastEnders* – it's unemployment, employment, sexual violence, madness, babies, gayness, and one damn thing after another. It is only in their chauvinisms these old boys find comfort in each other.

There's a reluctance to describe the current power struggle as realignment to the right because the struggle is so personalised, and it nests in a long tradition in which politics masquerade as appointments, positions, caucuses, fixes.

A succession of regional appointments have gone to the 'Right', general secretary Ron Todd's wisdom, if not his authority, has been challenged by the executive, chaired by Brian Nicholson, an exile from the broad Left. Todd's deputy, Bill Morris, who many people had hoped would become the first black leader of a British trade union, has been undermined – even though he has overall responsibility for the campaign to recruit young, part-time and seasonal workers. There's not a little racism shadowing him, behind his back.

Until the beginning of this year, the Left seemed to be losing its grip. It may have restored a fragile hegemony with this year's initiatives, but it cannot regain control with the old politics of place and position, by replacing right-wing barons with left-wing bouncers.

The Left's difficulty has been compounded by its dependence on the goodwill of a future Labour government. It has been cauterised by the economic pessimism of the shadow cabinet, and it has until now been unable to invent an *autonomous* economic strategy.

But the broad Left can't blame its vulnerability on a right-wing conspiracy. If the Right is currently ascendant, it is because it has gathered a diverse coalition alienated by the vacuum created by the union's drifting politics, and by the messes into which the Left lurched in the 1980s.

Nevertheless, the new right-wing axis is clearly informed by the 'Mainstream' movement operating in trade unions, and orchestrated by the inheritors of a strong centralist tradition never really buried since the demise of Arthur Deakin and his cold war autocracy. And there is a new generation of clever technocrats with a managerial rather than a democratic disposition waiting in the wings.

Much of the power politicking bears the mantra of loyalty to our leader, but with friends like these... If Kinnock has felt vulnerable to the challenge of both the 'old' and the 'new' Left in the Labour Party then now it looks like the real gauntlet might be thrown down by the new Right.

With his accession in 1983, the old Right were yesterday's men who were no longer the coherent bloc they were in the 1960s and 1970s. That's not to say they were powerless, but rather that they were no longer hegemonic. Now there is a new Right in place both in the party and in the trade unions, poised for his fall from grace. It is technocratic, it is tactical, it is efficient and it has no *political* imagination.

If Kinnock's electoral strategy fails then it will try to depose him. And if it can take the Transport and General with it then it is in a position to scatter the current coalitions holding the Labour Party together. And spring will no longer be in the air at Transport House. ●

Beatrix Campbell

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LETTERS

Why Currie?

Derek Kartun (*MT* April) deplores the March interview with Edwina Currie because it inflicted 'no visible damage' and didn't 'expose' or polemicise against her.

I've heard many similar comments and think they're very defeatist. It's as if the Left is automatically contaminated by the very fact of speaking to Tories – who inevitably 'win' anyway if we don't keep on pointing out the error of their ways. There's also a hint of elitisim here: 'we', of course, see through the Tories; it's all the poor benighted 'others' who need it spelling out for them.

Precisely because it didn't waste time point-scoring, I learned a lot from the interview, in a way I hadn't realised so graphically before, about how Tory populism can operate. What came across was the sheer amount of work the party puts in to getting a sense of 'public opinion' – testing out policies at different social levels, responding to perceived shifts of attitude. This was not the leftist image of high-handed authoritarianism but an astute and sophisticated political flexibility – and for that very reason, something we need to reckon with.

However, the fear is that taking any aspect of Toryism seriously thereby legitimises it. But Edwina Currie has loads of legitimacy already, simply by being in power and, more to the point, in a position to affect our lives in ways that we can't (yet) affect hers. So it's of real material concern – indeed, literally a matter of life and death – to be clearly informed about her views on health care and, as the interview indicated, how they may be changed by mass pressure.

'Did she *have* to come across as so *likeable*, though!' This was the ultimate misgiving of those who did think *MT* should have done the interview and also found it a fascinating read.

Of course likeability spells credibility, especially in media terms. But what about the *Left's* credibility if we don't live in the world-as-it-is and analyse it beyond sloganeering and polemic? It is only in leftist fantasies that all Tories are as brutish as their policies are self-evidently nasty. Never mind legitimising the Tories; in the end it is disabling to *our* politics if we don't get it right and understand exactly what their appeal is and just how appealing they can be! ●

Rosalind Brunt, Sheffield

Contradictions

I found the interview of Edwina Currie by Beatrix Campbell (*MT* March) a fascinating read. Embodying the contradictions of Thatcherism, Edwina Currie clearly understands its political project and the manner in which it utilises the failures of the Left for its own ends. At the same time however Currie fails to recognize the uniqueness of her own position and the fact that despite massive privilege she too is entangled in the gender contradictions endemic in our society. In interviewing the face of Thatcherism, *Marxism Today* has made all the more clear the tremendous struggle we all face in both the social and personal spheres if we are to overcome this ideology. ●

A Haroon Akram-Lodhi, Canada

Labour and Ulster

It is a hopeful sign that Andrew Gamble (*MT* March) noted Ulster as a region without Toryism, and an example of the Conservative Party's failure to be a national party – few people know that the Tory Party has not allowed a candidate to stand on its behalf in Northern Ireland for 15 years, and before that was represented by Unionists, who never had the slightest chance of getting a Roman Catholic capitalist's vote.

But it is even more useful that he reminded us what the *real* Northern Ireland problem is, heading his list of welfare-dependent areas with west Belfast: the Labour Party refuses to contest elections in that constituency, and the 16 others in Northern Ireland. It also refuses point-blank to accept any members in the province.

Now, if Mr Kinnock is the slightest bit sincere about maintaining the Labour Party as a national monument, he cannot continue to ignore the calls of socialists in Ulster to be allowed to join the fight against Toryism . . . if the next election is as close as seems likely, he may even need the votes. ●

Chris Stewart, Cambridge

Iron Ladies

I would like to take issue with Malcolm Rutherford's review (*MT* April) of Bea Campbell's book on women and conservatism, *The Iron Ladies*. In his review Rutherford suggests that Campbell gives space to Victoria Gillick, Mary Whitehouse, Olga Maitland and Sara Keays 'as if it is natural that women activists should be in the Tory ranks'. But neither Victoria Gillick or Mary Whitehouse is active in the Tory Party; instead, they have built campaigns outside the party which are perfectly willing to criticise the Thatcher government for not accepting their demands.

Indeed, it is a shame that your review did not discuss one of the most interesting sections of Campbell's book – her treatment of Victoria Gillick's construction of a populist campaign which invoked the rights of parents against state 'interference'. Campbell shows that the Gillick campaign was not part of a unified right-wing offensive but was in conflict with the Thatcher government and was opposed by the Conservative women's organisation. She also raises the uncomfortable problem that while Gillick's views are fundamentally opposed to those of modern feminism, she nonetheless voices (within an overall repressive argument) some of the same concerns that feminists have raised in the last century, and this about the pressures on young women.

In Campbell's book, we not only have an extremely interesting work on Conservative women, but a stimulating discussion of 'the moral Right' as well. ●

Martin Durham, Wolverhampton Polytechnic

Cultural Boycotts

The issue of the cultural boycott of South Africa is a quagmire of confused polices and good intentions. In the March issue of *Marxism Today*, Marek Kohn, like so many before him, sank into it.

He put forward two very different arguments. The first was that white South Africans should be deprived of the Western movies, music and tv that mean so much to them. Second, that the fact that Western record companies are now interested in 'the commercial potential of South African culture makes . . . clarified and renewed campaigning on the cultural boycott all the more urgent.' But what form this clarification should take, Kohn did not say. And this is of course the problem.

Nadine Gordimer, South Africa's greatest writer, at a 1975 symposium said that she supported a 'cultural boycott of South Africa strictly limited by pragmatical and empirical principles guided by those living in South Africa who are vigorously opposed to apartheid and understand best its cultural consequences.' She added that 'It would be absurd, for example, for an individual novelist or poet, or an association of novelists and poets to refuse to allow their books to be read in South Africa, where books, if not banned, may be bought by anyone of any colour.' For books, now read records and movies (since American film distributors now only supply films to unsegregated cinemas). This seems to me sensible, clear and workable. If applied to the recent performances of anti-apartheid plays in Britain, the grotesque pickets by the Anti-Apartheid Movement would never have taken place.

But the argument about Paul Simon involves something different. Nobody could accuse *Graceland* of aiding the apartheid system. Simon chose the black musicians he used because he thought they were great musicians. If anything, the album is a powerful blow in favour of black South African culture, bringing it to a level of international attention it has never before attained.

And this is precisely what Kohn, and many others, seem to object to. What on earth for? Mightn't capitalism be a useful ally for socialism to aid in the destruction of the apartheid system? Simon and his South African collaborators have shown that the best music in South Africa is produced by the blacks in the townships. Further success will help these and other musicians back in South Africa, but it will also raise the profile of black South African culture and bring the crisis of apartheid to the attention of people who would never be reached by well-meaning UN resolutions. The black artist as martyr – the Billie Holidays and Charlie Parkers – may be a potent symbol, but it's the Stevie Wonders, Lionel Richies and Bob Marleys who are able to fight most effectively. ●

Sean French, London

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LETTERS

The New Orthodoxy

Once I read *Marxism Today* for communist inspiration. Despite its turgid reiterations of revolutionary slogans, it helped to know 'our side' was winning everywhere else and that it was merely our own efforts that were inadequate.

Later I read *MT* for marxist insight. Despite the absence of solutions to the problems so brilliantly analysed, it was comforting to realise that everyone else in the real world had the same problems.

Recently I have received neither inspiration nor insight.

I welcomed its open forum for all left and socialist ideas, defended its widening of political horizons by informative articles on fashion, sport and sex and even supported the (occasional) intelligent articles from the Right, on the grounds that these helped us understand the mentality of our enemies. I don't regret any of this.

For me the primary purpose of *Marxism Today* is to develop and bring marxist ideas to a readership engaged in struggle for peace and socialism. However deep its theoretical analysis, however wide its range of concern (and without regard to its circulation ratings), the ultimate impact must be an unashamed *commitment to political action*.

When I read Martin Linton's trivia on CND (*MT* April) I realised how far the magazine has strayed. In the past a committed activist would have been asked to stimulate a constructive debate. Instead, *MT* provides the disconnected impressions of unnamed office workers met by a *Guardian* journalist on a brief visit to CND's 'headquarters'.

Guardian journalism may sell newspapers but offers neither insight nor inspiration to peace campaigners. Increased sales is not an end in itself and, if achieved by depoliticising *MT*, could destroy its very purpose. By the same token, I regret that *MT's* forum now seems to exclude the traditional Left, that its fashion, sport and sex columns do not inform or widen political horizons and that articles from and about the Right do not stimulate but merely annoy. I fear that the search for a wider audience has become an end in itself.

Please, please Marxism Today, recapture your commitment. ●
John Cox, Gwent

State of Flux

I thought the contributions of Stuart Hall and Ernesto Laclau (*MT* April) were important and challenging to all socialists and communists, and maybe far wider. I'm sure Stuart Hall expressed many people's reaction to their introduction to Gramsci's theories. Those who came through that tunnel largely illuminated by Stalin's leninism emerged into a much broader plain when trying to apply Gramsci's thought to a world changing at incredible speed.

Frequently we observe the social and political systems of the world from a stationary orbit when we should be in a permanently moving direction. It's not a bad idea to remember Lenin's dictum 'all things are in a state of flux'. Ernesto's article must provoke a new consideration of the role of the Communist Party.

My feeling is that because of its historical development (in all countries) we drag around a great deal of ideological armour-plating and habits that make us automatically sectarian; and of course, as human beings, we all have our own personal battles. If we can grasp and accept a role as *part* of a pluralist democratic process then marxism can more quickly develop as part of the consciousness of humanity, not as the preserve of an elite, but as a logical analysis of the problems and hopes of the majority of human beings everywhere. ●
Dave Davis, Bromley

Something nasty

Richard Gott (*MT* April) is quite right to sense something nasty and irrationalist behind the prophets of post-modernism/post-modernity: it's none other than Nietzsche, who has a perennial appeal in times of epic disillusionment such as these.

It's all too tempting to give up on Western rationalism and all its works – good and bad – and wallow in the 'beguiling' would-be 'subversive' rhetoric of the post-modernists. But let's be clear what the post-modernist thinkers are about. As Habermas has observed, they've really opted out of any form of political debate and struggle, and offer no hope at all for the future. We need to build a saner world, a 'greener' world, but we'll only be able to do it by *using* rationalism, not by abandoning it. ●
Ian Christie, London

Punter Power

Kate Hoey's welcome piece on football's current manoeuverings (*MT* April) raises some interesting points. The speed with which the Fulham-QPR merger plan was buried, and the pressure brought to bear on Bulstrode and Marler estates, shows clearly the influence that supporters can have once they act decisively. The Football League were more or less forced into action and shamed for their lack of originality by the response from supporters of the clubs involved, and more importantly, from concerned fans from other clubs.

The matter of local authority/club/supporter liaison is crucial to a group like the Football Supporters Association (FSA). Events in London this year have proved the ability that supporters have in matters concerning the game.

For too long we have been at the butt end of all manner of dirty dealings, malpractice and shoddy treatment from the football establishment. Surely the expertise supporters have, and what is more, their economic contribution to the game, cannot possibly be ignored any longer. Consultation with supporters on all matters of the game, from policing of matches to stadium facilities, would display only too adequately how out of touch our 'national game' has become under its present structures.

Kate Hoey has revealed to readers of *Marxism Today* a new and vibrant contribution to the 'broad democratic alliance' – football supporters.

This is the age of punter power. ●
Michael S Taylor, FSA, Manchester

Images of Power

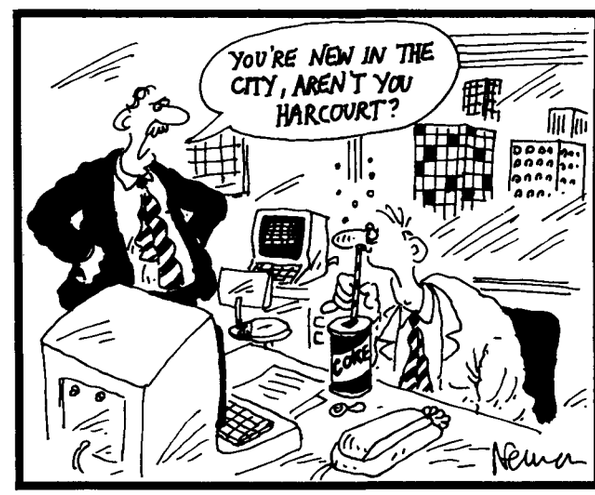
The advertisement in the April *MT* for a shop selling expensive menswear shocked, sickened, depressed and angered me.

The idealised white man shown wearing a white suit clearly had plenty of money. He probably lived in the Home Counties, or at least had a very large garden where his loyal dog could run around and from which home-grown roses could be brought to decorate his spacious house in a vase alongside pictures of women demure in long white dresses. Huge dry-cleaning bills? No problem. Or maybe his clothes never got soiled because he didn't have to do much, being a gentleman of independent means.

I for one am totally outside the readership profile implied by the advertisement. Images of rich, powerful white men and the goods and services marketed to satisfy their desires are constantly inflicted upon us. I'd like a respite from that when I buy a copy of *Marxism Today*. ●
Fran Hazelton, London

Stretching it

April Fool! I'm glad I spotted it because you really had me worried. But I should have known better, the thought of any serious marxist arguing that the emancipation of the working class is no longer the act of the working class, or that the state can be limited and controlled in the interests of the majority is, after all, stretching things a bit far. I'll bear it in mind though, next time I'm being attacked by the police on a picketline. ●
Andrea Butcher, Swansea



Cartoon: Nick Newman

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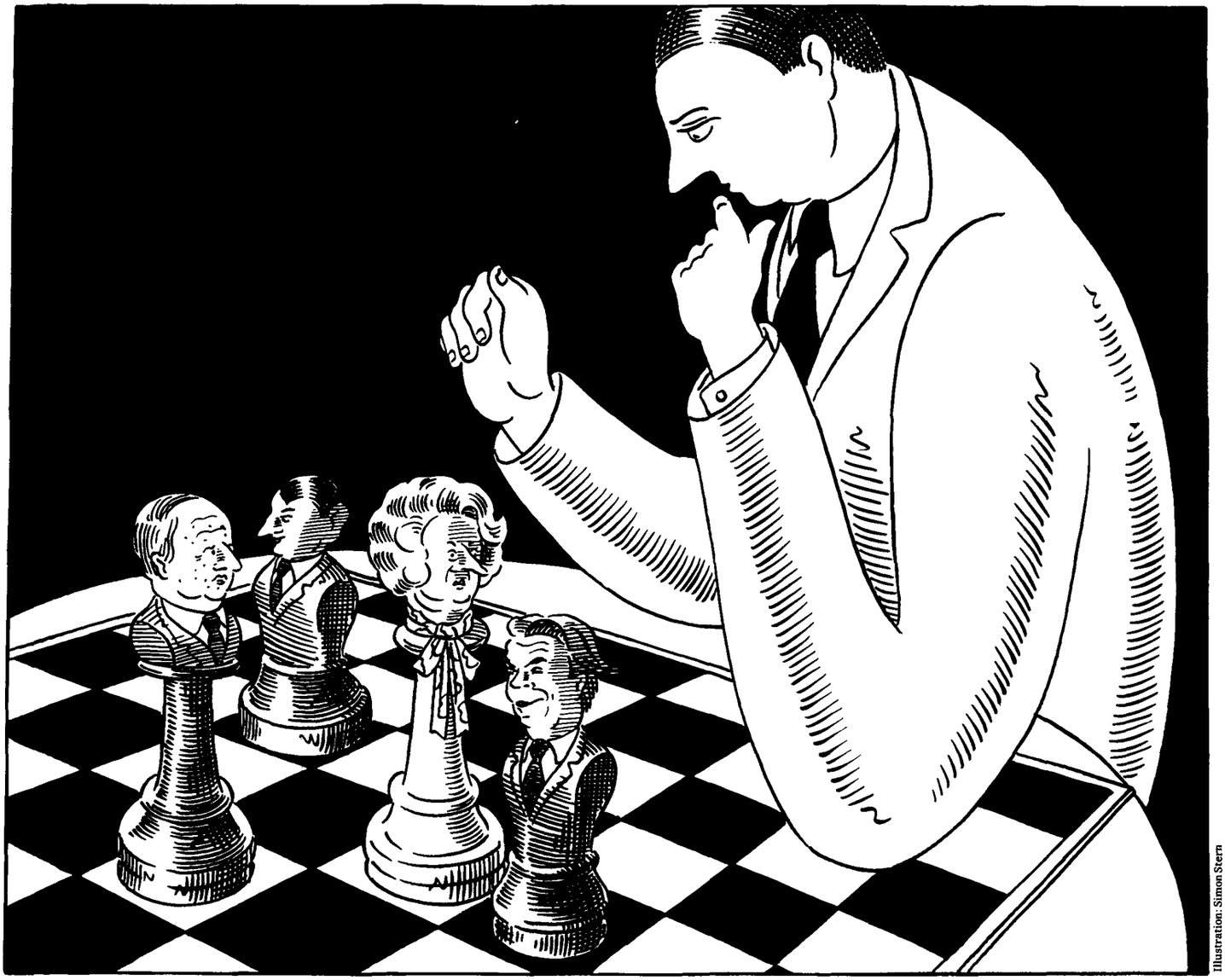

Illustration: Simon Stern

Snatching Victory From Defeat

A third Tory term looks the most likely consequence of the general election. **Eric Hobsbawm** argues the case for tactical voting.

The time for the general election is coming, and so is the time for people on the Left to face the truth about it, before it is entirely drowned in electoral rhetoric and forecasters' algebra.

Three things have been manifest since 1983, if not before. First, that the defeat of the Thatcher government is the essential task in British politics, and should have absolute priority over any other aim and political calculation. There is no need to argue the case. *Marxism Today* has done so for years, and anybody who does not believe that this appalling government, by far the most dangerous and disastrous in 20th century British history, ought not to be allowed to do even more irreversible damage to Britain, had better stop reading here. But before stopping, they might just remind themselves that this is the only government this century which has made the actual destruction of the labour movement and the Labour Party its declared aim.

Second, that the Thatcher government is and was, even in 1983, elected as a *minority* government, against the wishes of 58% of those who voted. At present, to judge by the polls, it has about two thirds of the people against it. There has never been a Thatcherite wave of public opinion like the Reaganite wave in the USA. *Most Britons have never bought the Thatcher line of products,* in spite of the packaging and hard sell. On paper, there is no basis for a Thatcher victory.

Third, that the Thatcher government could not have been elected but for the divisions among the opposition, ie, between Labour and the Alliance. And if Thatcher has any chance of being re-elected, it is *entirely* due to the continuance of these divisions. After the election of 1983 I wrote in this journal (*Marxism Today* Oct 1983 p. 9):

'Given the approximately even split between the two parts of the anti-Tory vote, the Conservatives could drop about a quarter of their total vote and still come first past the post. It is vital to keep this point in mind for the next five years, because the prospect of defeating Thatcher hinges on it, whatever else the labour movement does to recover.

'If, at the next election, Thatcherism

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is everywhere opposed by two or more candidates competing for each other's votes, the Tories can look forward to being in power well into the 1990s. Some way of uniting the majority of the British people, which is opposed to Thatcherism, must be found'.

This is as true today as it was then. Only in October 1983 there were almost four years left to do something about it, and today we have only weeks or at best months.

A fourth fact, unfortunately, has now also become established beyond serious argument. The Labour Party is extremely unlikely to win the election on its own and to form a single-handed government, although this does not mean that Labour may not emerge as the largest single party or provide a prime minister and cabinet. Labour bounced back from the 1983 disaster with remarkable speed under Neil Kinnock's new leadership. But since then it has never really risen above the level of 37% or so which it recovered so quickly, and it has never seriously looked like doing so. What is more, it has usually lagged a little behind the Tories, or at any rate it has rarely been ahead of them in the polls, as the major party of opposition and alternative government could be expected to be. This is not the time to try to explain why Labour has failed to extend its support since 1983, thus making extremely unlikely what would have been by far the best solution: a Labour government elected by a good majority of voters. The crucial point is that it has failed to, and that it is mere whistling in the dark to predict that somehow in the course of a few weeks of electoral campaigning, or even (if the elections are postponed) a few months, things will somehow come right.

The best Labour can hope for realistically in what, like it or not, has become a three-way system of British politics, is that it will come out of the election as the largest party, or the largest non-Tory party in parliament. That is not an unreasonable hope.

The emergence of what is clearly a permanent tripartite division in British politics is the fifth fact which must determine our political choices. It is not really a three-party system, since the middle camp has only the negative unity of not wanting to belong to the Right or to the Left. That is why the support for the Alliance has normally been so much more unstable and fragile than that of either the Tories or Labour, responding disproportionately to casual short-term events and media exposure.

But this should not mislead us. Whatever the future of the Alliance, some kind of central mass in politics is here to stay, if only because *both* the major parties are patently continuing their long-term process of decline. (Much of the talk about the decline of Labour served to divert attention from the fact that in 1983, the year of Thatcher's electoral triumph the Tory Party mobilised a smaller share of the British electorate than at any time since 1923.) The Alliance vote may or may not rise into the 30%s, but it is almost certainly not going to fall below 20% in the election under any foreseeable circumstances.

There is only one logical conclusion for those of us who put the defeat of Thatcher first. It is, in every constituency, to vote for the candidate who offers the best chance of beating the Tories, whether Labour or Alliance. None of the leaders of the parties of opposition will tell us to do so. In fact, all will tell us the opposite, following the electoral mythology and political folklore which holds that politicians, like boxers before the big fight, must on no account admit that they could not knock the other fellow out of the ring. Thus David Steel, against all probability, looks forward to the Alliance sweeping Scotland, and Neil Kinnock waves away any thought of negotiating with the Alliance even after the election, for fear of discouraging Labour voters. But neither of them believe what they are saying and we also know better.

We know as well as Steel, Owen Jenkins and Kinnock that, if we had a two-stage electoral system like the French, tactical voting would be as normal as breathing. We should all vote for our own party in the first round, and, having seen which candidate was ahead – Labour or Alliance – vote for him or her in the second round to keep the Tory out. Well, we have to do the same without a French system, and without any guidance from our parties. We shall have to take the decision ourselves. I think there are enough citizens to use democracy sensibly and therefore to defeat Thatcher.

All arguments against tactical voting assume *either* that a single-handed victory of Labour (or the Alliance) over Thatcher is possible, *or* that a defeat of this government is not the overwhelming political priority of the moment. The first possibility is, of course, available in theory, but there is no bookmaker in the country who would not welcome punters who wanted to give away their money by betting on it. Given the split in the non-Tory vote, the odds *must* be stacked in favour of Thatcher, or at least against the single-handed victory of either opposition force. Some kind of unity is the only effective hope for beating the government. Anyone who opposes it, does not really mind whether the government is beaten or not, or else he or she is simply not using their head.

This applies even to the rare arguments against tactical voting which have any merit at all. On the Labour side there is only one, though it is not publicly acknowledged much. It is that tactical voting, by producing a substantial third party in parliament, will destroy the two-party system and therefore the chance of future single-handed Labour governments. It would permanently put the Left (and the Right) at the mercy of centre parties and coalition governments.

On the Alliance side (or rather on the SDP side, for the Liberals have been much more reticent in this respect), the argument is frankly that a Thatcher victory is a price well worth paying for the chance to ruin the Labour Party for good and come back after another five years of Thatcherism as the major, and hopefully the only, opposition force and alternative government. (This, incidentally, is also the Thatcher scenario for the future of British politics.) Such views have been expressed frankly by SDP utopians like Peter Jenkins and are clearly much discussed in and around the relevant wine bars. As Peter Kellner reports, (*Independent* 30/3/87), 'Their strategic dilemma is whether to seek a share in power after the next election, or the destruction of the Labour Party by the one after that.' If they opt for the second, then tactical voting against the Tories has no attraction, since it is likely to produce a Labour-led government or coalition.

'Politicians, like boxers before the big fight, must on no account admit that they could not knock the other fellow out of the ring'

But in fact, except for megalomania, personal ambition or the festering wounds of past political feuding, a Labour-led coalition, or even a Labour government depending on Alliance support, are entirely acceptable options for the Alliance. They have to be far preferable to the alternative of a third Thatcherite government. For the Alliance is unquestionably an anti-Thatcherite phenomenon, and insofar as the Tory Party has been hijacked by the self-made suburban stormtroopers of the Right, a secession from Conservatism. Dr Owen might prefer a Centre-Right coalition, though even he cannot publicly say yet that he would be prepared to ally with the Thatchers and the Tebbits, but the only alignment that is being seriously considered in case no single party wins an absolute majority in parliament is one of the Centre-Left.

The educated middle classes who form the social core of the Alliance are repelled by Thatcherism and what it has done to Britain. Even the ranks of the SDP, which, as the jokes go, is the Professors' Party and (when at prayer) the Church of England, are not likely to welcome paying the price of another five years of Thatcherism for the chance to have a David rather than a Neil as premier in 1992 or 93. They are certainly not socialists, let alone left-wing socialists. However, voting in union to defeat a Conservative comes a lot more naturally to most Alliance voters than voting separately to let a Conservative in.

Given all this, tactically united voting also suits the Alliance. It would, for the first time, give the centre a substantial block of MPs in parliament, and thus

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break the barrier which has virtually disenfranchised a quarter of the electorate. It would, quite likely, allow that centre block to hold the balance between the two major parties, and thus give it disproportionate political leverage. It would negotiate an electoral reform from strength. Sensible Alliance strategists would happily pay the price of putting in a moderate government headed by Labour. No doubt they would prefer an Alliance government, but, in spite of campaign rhetoric, this is not on at present, barring a conjunction of miracles.

For Labour this is not a brilliant prospect. One way or another it means making room for a permanent middle party, and probably a long term prospect of tripartite politics and governments by coalition such as have operated in West Germany, Austria and the Irish Republic for a long time. It does not necessarily remove the possibility of a single-party government in the future, (think of Austria), but undoubtedly this becomes more difficult. And under normal circumstances, it would give the centre a good deal of control over what a Labour-led government could do or not do. It will undoubtedly be a set-back for British socialist hopes. Nobody will open champagne bottles in celebration, even though it would bring about both the defeat of Thatcherism and, more than likely, a government headed by Neil Kinnock.

'But what is the alternative? A third Thatcher government. Union of Centre and Left is the best hope we have'

But what is the alternative? A third Thatcher government. Union of Centre and Left is the best hope we have. The game of the 'ifs' is over. 'If Labour recovers what it lost since 1979'. It hasn't, and it certainly won't by the election. 'If the Alliance were to collapse'. It hasn't, and it certainly won't by the election. Neither will the Tories. Anyway, what more can we reasonably expect than a Tory Party which, on the present polls, will have a lower percentage of voters than it had in Labour's triumphal election of 1945? There is today only one way to get rid of Thatcher, to get a Labour-led government, and to keep open the road to a real Labour revival in the future.

It will, at best, offer Labour the chance of a half-victory or a victory in shackles. But the alternative prospect is far darker and less acceptable. Defeat in the election means not only another five years of Thatcherism, which will thus gain the chance to make its rightwing revolution irreversible. It will also, as the SDP calculations make clear, put the future of the Labour Party at risk (not to mention the leadership of Neil Kinnock). What is at issue for Labour supporters is both the future of the British people and of their party.

There is, of course, no need to listen to apocalyptic predictions about its demise from people whose only purpose is to demoralise Labour voters and to prepare more Labour politicians for secession. But two things cannot be denied. First, that the body of *unconditional* support on which the party can count today is no larger than it was in 1983, and may be now have crumbled a bit more. We can no longer safely count on more than a quarter of the electorate unless there is a genuine Labour revival. (The supporters who came back to Labour after Neil Kinnock became leader were precisely *conditional* supporters, ready to give the party another try – but also ready to reconsider their options.) And second, that a Labour defeat will pretty certainly produce troubles in the party, perhaps with the renewal of the public infighting and civil wars which are the safest known way of alienating supporters.

That is exactly what Labour's opponents, and especially Mrs Thatcher's Tories, are counting on: a party demoralised by a third successive defeat, a party tearing itself to pieces in public, a party which does not look as though it has a future.

There is only one way to give Labour a further chance. It is to secure the defeat of the Thatcher government. There is only one way of defeating the Thatcher government. It is by voting for the candidate who is best placed to keep out the Tory. Anyone who tells us anything else, however sincerely, is betraying the British people, not to mention democracy and the labour movement. ●

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The Natural Alliance

The Alliance just can't be ignored by the Left anymore. **Martin Kettle** suggests that it has a surprising amount in common with Labour

Aren't we smart: but are they left as well?

Most Labour people still do not take the SDP-Liberal Alliance seriously. They should have done so long ago. Soon they will have to. For the Alliance is here to stay. To pretend otherwise is a form of political flat-earthism.

Labour people have tended to dismiss the Alliance in one of two ways, and sometimes both. The first way is to see it as irrelevant. This has basically been the habitual postwar left way of looking at the Liberals. It was momentarily called into question in February 1974. But it was not seriously challenged until 1981-83. Curiously, it was hardly affected by the experience of the Lib-Lab pact of 1977. Even today, six years into the Alliance's history, it still exists. It must be increasingly clear that it is wishful thinking.

The alternative has been to dismiss the Alliance – and especially its SDP part – as untouchably renegade. This is an even more time-honoured mental cast on the Left. Every socialist party, large or small, has a defection somewhere in its history which serves the purpose of a great warning. Labour's used to be 1931. Now it is 1981. In this mind set, the defectors are unspeakable, unthinkable and untouchable. For many, this is still an article of faith whenever the SDP is mentioned. It is, however, self-indulgent and mentally lazy.

It is easy, in the more sober political climate of 1987, to forget just how pervasive such cavalier attitudes towards the Alliance were until the shock of the 1983 election. The effects of 1981 took some time to sink in. Many Bennites actually reacted to the formation of the SDP in 1981 with relief rather than concern. ('The sooner a lot of them get out the better: the better for the rest of us who are remaining' – Valerie Wise 1981). Knowing what they know now, it might be useful to learn whether they would say that still? Most people on the Labour Left (and some on the Right, too) certainly failed to read the writing on the wall for the next two years, even though it was plain to see. Ludicrously unrealistic expectations about the 1983 election were widespread right up to polling day. Even after Warrington, Crosby, Hillhead and Bermondsey, most still saw the coming election as another straight fight between Labour and the Tories, just like all the others, and thought that Labour might win it. That is why the result in 1983 was so shocking to so many.

Since 1983, Labour has been compelled to treat the *electoral* power of the Alliance with more respect. That is partly why Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley won such convincing victories in the 1983 leadership elections. That is why Labour has overhauled its campaigning image and presentation. That is why Labour has generally treated the opinion polls seriously since 1983, whereas before 1983 it did not. It is one of the reasons why, generally speaking, the organised Labour Left has been in eclipse.

Yet this hardly constitutes a comprehensive response to the growth of the Alliance. In particular, it neglects and undervalues the Alliance's *political* strength in the wake of Thatcherism. The underlying belief of the Labour leadership since 1983 has been that, having learned new presentational skills from the Alliance and the Tories, it would be possible to reclaim and reunite Labour's 'traditional' political strength outside its working class base. One of the attractions of Kinnock, in this context, was that he made it respectable to go on ignoring the Alliance. But the strategy has not worked. The Alliance is still strong and Labour is still vulnerable. The net effect has been that there is still a vacuum of discussion within the party about the Alliance and how to relate to it. The policy towards the Alliance is simply not to have a policy towards it.

The electoral limitations of that attitude have become extremely clear since the summer of 1986 (see box). At that point, the polls still appeared to offer a limited vindication of the approach. In the summer, Labour led reasonably decisively from the Tories with the Alliance a clear third and all was right with the world. Labour's score was not tremendous, but it was fairly strong and it appeared to have liberated itself from the slump of 1983, when it had been in great danger of being overtaken by the Alliance.

Since then, those assumptions have been very seriously undermined. The Tories recovered in the autumn, at the expense of the Alliance, especially after the Liberal assembly defence vote. But, in so doing, the Tories seriously exposed Labour's own electoral limitations. The Alliance began to move back, but at Labour's expense, a process which was given a huge heave by the Greenwich by-election at the end of February. After that, the Alliance scored heavily from Labour, but also in part from the Tories. At the time of writing, the most recent Gallup poll shows Labour pushed into third place.

These changes have reminded Labour of its electoral vulnerability to the

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Denis Doran/Reflex

Alliance. That message does seem to have got through. Labour people are today more objective about their party's relative strength and its prospects than they have been for some years. Unlike in 1983, Labour activists are now privately pessimistic about the party's chances of winning the election outright – and have been for some time. But that is not the same thing as taking the Alliance seriously. Most Labour supporters are still generally unwilling to think through the implications of these reduced prospects, either in terms of cooperation or as an historical event. Coalition politics, however loosely defined, remain as taboo as the SDP. For most Labour people, moreover, Alliance politics remain utterly unknown territory. As a result, there is widespread ignorance at every level of the nature of the Alliance challenge.

So what is the SDP-Liberal Alliance today – and how might Labour respond to it?

As the Alliance itself freely admits, it is an electoral fusion of two distinct traditions in British politics. Liberalism and Fabian social democracy are not inherently similar movements and theories. Even within the Alliance, practitioners of each tradition keep the other at arm's length. But the Alliance has, nevertheless, evolved a way of reconciling these contradictions. There are few Liberals who find any intellectual problems with the quintessentially social democratic economic policies advocated by Roy Jenkins. And there are few Social Democrats who cannot be reconciled to the devolutionary approach to government championed by David Steel. This is not to say there are no disagreements or contradictions within the Alliance. There are many. There are certainly grudging allies on either side (think of Michael Meadowcroft or Michael Thomas, for instance). But the atmosphere within each component part of the Alliance tends to be noticeably more tolerant than within Labour. Whatever their differences, Alliance people seem to have grasped that division is a fatal handicap. As the third party, more remote from power than Labour, they have a discipline which Labour seems incapable of commanding.

This is an important point to grasp, because there are those on the Left who would like to disbelieve it. It is not uncommon, when discussing the possibilities of a hung parliament with Labour people, to hear them say that it will be possible to split the Liberals away from the SDP if it becomes necessary.

The reality is that this is deeply improbable. Suppose after the election that Labour finds itself in a postiion where it could command a Commons majority with the Liberals alone. Those Liberals would have just fought an election with the SDP as Alliance candidates, with Alliance slogans and for an Alliance manifesto. They would be Alliance MPs serving under Alliance leaders. Does anyone seriously believe that the Liberals would desert the SDP in such circumstances, even if they wanted to (which they don't)?

That is not to say that a sly Labour leadership could not or would not use every opportunity to divide the Alliance, if there was some point to such an approach. There certainly are issues, such as defence and nuclear power, which divide most Liberals from most Social Democrats. There certainly is a lot of grassroots Liberal suspicion against the SDP, and especially against David Owen. And there certainly is a lot of grassroots SDP contempt for the Liberals. But there is also a very widespread, hard-headed acceptance on both sides of the advantages of and necessity for the Alliance.

It is extremely rare, these days as opposed to five years ago, to hear any sustained or influential objection to the pact on either side. Most of the pressure for change, indeed, is for union or merger, not for separation. And this from parties (particularly the Liberals) which have had to make a succession of self-denying political decisions in a relatively short time. What is striking to the outside observer is not that there is hostility between the two allies, but that there is so little of it. In reality, any analysis of three party politics needs to deal with the party that actually exists – the SDP-Liberal Alliance – rather than its original components.

That whole Labour instinct for saying 'Liberals perhaps; SDP never' is in any case a relic of a sort of big party chauvinism. It would take two sides to make a Lib-Lab pact and Labour should not assume that because it deigns to toss them a bone, the Liberal lapdog will come to heel. Cooperation between two parties is a very serious business for them both. It is just as big an issue for the Liberals as it is for Labour.

So any decoupling of the Liberals and the SDP would be a long-term, subtle business. If it were to be achieved, it might well be easier for the Tories to achieve it through an appeal to the SDP than for Labour through an appeal to the Liberals. But this is all pretty hypothetical stuff. For the purposes of immediate politics, the important thing is that Labour can't have Steel without Owen. People must think about the Alliance they have, not the Alliance they would like to have.

'For the Alliance is here to stay. To pretend otherwise is a form of political flat-earthism'

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BUILDING UCATT FOR THE FUTURE

Union of Construction Allied Trades and Technicians
North West Regional Council

May Day Greetings to all Workers

A. Lowe
Regional Secretary
W. Jones
Regional Council Chairman
137 Dickenson Road, Rusholme, Manchester M14 5JB

T.G.W.U.
Region 6

'Rise like lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number
Shake your chains to air like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you
Ye are many – they are few.'
Shelley

Wally Nugent Regional Chairman
Bob Owens. Regional Secretary
Transport House, 1 Crescent, Salford M54 PR

T.G.W.U.
REGION 5 MIDLANDS
May Day Greetings
to all Colleagues and Friends
in the Labour Movement
JIM HUNT
Regional Secretary
LES WEAVER
Regional Chairman

HANDS OFF OUR HEALTH SERVICE

NATIONAL UNION OF PUBLIC EMPLOYEES

nga
Solent Branch

May Day Greetings to all within the Labour Movement.

President: **T. Cotton**
Secretary: **R. Page**

ACTT
May Day Greetings
General Secretary
Alan Sapper
Equality Officer
Sadie Robarts
ACTT, 111 Wardour St, London W1 4AY

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Alliance's Rising Fortunes

	CON	LAB	SDP/LIB
1983 General Election	44	28	26
August 1986	34	37	26
September 1986	35	39	24
October 1986	39	39	19
November 1986	40	38	20
December 1986	40	37	21
January 1987	39	38	20
February 1987	39	36	23
March 1987	39	32	28

Source: *The Guardian* monthly average of the last five opinion polls taken before the end of each month.

'In reality, any analysis of three party politics needs to deal with the party that actually exists – the SDP-Liberal Alliance – rather than its original components'

The real SDP-Liberal Alliance is in remarkably strong shape today. In the autumn of 1986, there were many who thought that the Alliance had finally foundered. Differences on defence between Owen and the Liberals seemed to have knocked the stuffing out of the organisation and to have exacerbated all sorts of little local disagreements which would otherwise have been easily overcome.

It was a disconsolate political culture. Its poll ratings slid to under 20%. And yet, in under six months, the Alliance has been able to turn itself round to such an extent that Jenkins could tell Scottish Liberals in March that they should be planning for all-out electoral victory this year.

Part of this achievement is down to good luck. But it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Alliance has also more solid political assets on its side. You cannot put 10 points on your national poll ratings in a month without having something distinctive to say that people want to hear. You don't recover from such difficulties without a considerable degree of collective self-discipline and agreement about objectives. You don't win a seat like Greenwich without having some actual appeal of your own which appears more attractive than those of your opponents. And nobody wins elections without good organisation and good publicity.

The Alliance has both of these things. It has a formidable and well-trained by-election team. It uses very detailed computerised mail-shots to attract specific groups of voters. Its political full-timers are geared to campaigning, unlike Labour's who are too often preoccupied with either internal party politics or so-called 'research'. And, of course, the Alliance has very considerable media support. Among newspapers, the Alliance is openly supported by *Today* and the *Mail on Sunday*. It is sympathetically treated editorially by *The Guardian*, *The Observer* and *The Independent*.

It is generously treated (especially by comparison with Labour) in the Murdoch papers (Dick Taverne is currently being considered for a *Sun* column, for instance). Against that, though, it receives hostile coverage in the Maxwell papers. But it has begun, in recent months, to receive more equitable air-time with the Tories and Labour on television and radio news programmes. That was not always the case.

To say that the Alliance is a creation of the media has always been an exaggeration. The Alliance cultivates the media, offers a very good service to the media, and consequently gets well-treated in the media. To say that it is being built up as the acceptable soft alternative to Labour is true. The Alliance benefits from a presumption of innocence which Labour is never allowed. But it also begs the question as to why there is a political market for such an alternative.

Six years ago, the Alliance was frequently charged with having no policies, of travelling light, of being simply in the market for any votes that were going. Today, the charge tends to be the reverse, that the Alliance (and particularly the SDP) is awash with policy to an almost absurd degree. It has certainly been an encyclopaedic task to keep abreast of Alliance policy-making over those years. But now the process has achieved something like stability.

The earnest commissions of the SDP have now all reported. The policy panels and the working groups have concluded their consultations. The conferences, councils and assembly have deliberated and voted. Alliance policy is now authoritatively expressed in the document by Owen and Steel titled *The Time Has Come* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson), published in January 1987 just before the well-publicised Barbican 'relaunch'. The Alliance election manifesto wil be drawn up on the basis of the much more detailed material in *The Time Has Come*.

The Time Has Come is, unmistakably, a document produced from the Centre-Left of British politics. In a sense, it is self-evident that it should be, given who has produced it. But it is important to reassert the fact because it has been challenged by those who are blinded to the true nature of the Alliance by the politics of David Owen, who is equally unmistakably on the very right of the Alliance itself. On the basis of *The Time Has Come*, and especially in the light of a detailed comparison of it with the various recent policy proposals of the Labour Party, any analysis of the options for progress in this country which excludes the Alliance from sympathetic consideration is simply sectarian. Within the limits of usefulness of such terms, the Alliance should be regarded as part of the British reformist Left, along with Labour. It is a competitor with Labour, but it is not an enemy, as the Tories are. Or, rather, it is only an enemy if you reject reformism, in which case so is Labour.

The overwhelming characteristic of the policies set out in *The Time Has Come* is that they are more cautious versions of Labour's current policies. That does not dispose of the whole question by any means, of course. There are many areas where the Alliance takes a qualitatively different approach altogether (hardly surprising in view of the different traditions), which is difficult to compare with Labour (industrial democracy, say). There are others where, while adopting a clearly comparable approach, the Alliance is more radical than Labour (some areas of legal reform and human rights). There are those where, while sharing similar aims with Labour, the Alliance adopts distinctly different routes (taxation, welfare benefits). And there are also policies where Labour and the Alliance are in direct disagreement (proportional representation, defence, unions).

But the general characteristics of the policies in most fields are compatible, not to say strikingly similar (education, health, equal opportunities, law and order, overseas aid, South Africa). Most interesting of all is that this is generally true of economic policy at the level of attitudes to borrowing, to public sector investment, and to job creation.

A comparison of Labour and Alliance policies towards the police reveals some characteristic differences. Alliance policy is based on similar reforming principles to Labour's: the importance of crime prevention, of better attention to the needs of women and minorities as victims, of police-community cooperation, of better democratic accountability, less public order work, independent complaints systems, better training. But the detail in Labour's policy is much superior to and more logical than the Alliance's policy. Labour's policy is thought through. The Alliance's is very generalised.

But such thinness isn't altogether typical. It is repeated in some other areas of social policy – though not in all, for instance, education and legal reform. These, by contrast, are areas where the SDP robbed Labour of some of its most articulate and experienced experts. People like Anne Sofer, Shirley Williams, Michael Zander and Anthony Lester have provided the Alliance with realistic, detailed and progressive agendas in these fields (nor were the Liberals' cupboards entirely bare before either). For the

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CHARTER FOR TEMPORARY AND PART-TIME WORKERS

Bill Morris Deputy General Secretary

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most part, the choice between Labour and the Alliance here is very narrow.

There are, though, a number of fields where the policies are quite clearly at major odds. The most politically sensitive areas are defence, electoral reform and industrial relations.

In each of these fields, the formal policies of Labour and the Alliance are opposed. Each represents also an important area in which, for reasons of electoral advantage, the party leaders can emphasise their differences. But there is more to these differences than that. These three areas each touch some essential part of the modern political tradition of the respective parties. They are not lightly reconcilable save in the very short term. Yet there is also, in each, a more fluid situation under the surface within each party and across the parties.

'Within the limits of usefulness of such terms, the Alliance should be regarded as part of the British reformist Left, along with Labour'

Defence is particularly interesting and important here. On the face of it, Labour defence policy is quite clear. Labour will scrap Trident, decommission Polaris, return cruise and order the removal of all other US nuclear weapons from UK soil. It will, however, remain in NATO, retain US non-nuclear bases and maintain defence spending by new conventional defence measures. Moreover, a number of detailed policy adjustments now imply that timetables for this policy will be more elastic than originally conceived and will not be unilateral while INF talks continue between the US and the USSR.

By contrast, Alliance policy involves the cancellation of Trident, the maintenance of Polaris subject to multilateral arms talks with the hope that it would not be required beyond the 1990s, the maintenance of cruise under dual key subject to multilateral talks and continued commitment to NATO. The Alliance would also explore greater Anglo-French nuclear cooperation as an insurance against American isolationism.

The differences of detail and general approach here are considerable. Labour's policy is non-nuclear. The Alliance's is equally clearly nuclear. These contrasts are, however, becoming increasingly blurred by the Labour Party as the general election nears and its policy is perceived as unpopular. Labour has become flexible about timetables and has tied the cruise question into the Geneva talks. It remains committed to NATO, a nuclear union. For its part, the Alliance has raised the question of western European defence cooperation, even on the nuclear level.

Each party is unsettled on defence. Labour is not united behind the pure unilateralist non-nuclear policy nor behind maintaining defence spending at existing levels. The Alliance is not united behind the modernisation and maintenance of Polaris. Both sides have their irreconcilables – Labour with its large anti-nuclear wing and the Alliance with the SDP's 'a British bomb at any cost' wing. As things stand, therefore, Labour and the Alliance are irreconcilable on defence policy. Yet there remain areas of real uncertainty. Any attempt to formulate a coherent Labour policy towards the Alliance as a whole, whether in a hung parliament or not, depends upon much greater clarity (and then unity) within Labour about where precisely it stands on defence and how much importance it attaches to that stance.

Similar considerations apply to trade unions and electoral reform. The unions remain the basic divide between Labour and Alliance cultures (this is as true of traditional Liberalism as it is of the SDP). The SDP's hatred of the unions is a very big obstacle here, partly as a symbolic issue but also because the Alliance is now committed to a system of elections and balloting and to a framework of industrial law which falls little short of the recent Conservative green paper.

And yet, more can be made of these differences than actually exists. Labour is pledged to repeal the 'Tory laws'. But it is also committed to reintroduce many of the individual rights for union members that are at the heart of the Alliance preoccupation. It is a commitment which is powerfully challenged from within the union movement, yet it seems to be popular with the majority of Labour supporters and union members. Moreover, there is no issue more frequently debated within the labour movement than the problem of regenerating its democratic credibility. There is therefore no necessary gulf between Labour and the Alliance (as there is with the Tories) over the legitimacy of unions as such – unless either Labour or the Alliance chooses to make one. There are big disagreements about the form and content of that legitimacy, but that is not necessarily the same thing.

Once again, as with defence, Labour needs to be absolutely clear with itself about its long-term commitment to the current policy. If it is committed to it, then it is moving into an area in which some form of reconciliation with the Alliance on the question is an option. If it is not committed, then that option is not available. There is a choice to make.

This leaves until last the question of electoral reform to which the Alliance is so committed. To a certain extent, the Alliance has been backing away from the absolute rigidity which it once adopted on the issue. In the short term, electoral reform probably no longer stands between Labour and the Alliance in the same way as it once did. Yet nobody should be in any doubt about the Alliance's serious, central commitment to some sort of electoral reform. And, in the long term, there is no more important question for Labour than its attitude to electoral reform.

Irrespective of the immediate circumstances of its relations with the Alliance, Labour faces a serious debate – which it has so far ducked – on it. Not just about whether there should be reform or not, but about what sort of reform it ought to be. These are questions which concern Labour supporters as well as Alliance supporters. The idea that Labour could form a majority government on the strength of, say, 38% of the vote (ie, less than 30% of the actual electorate), or form an unconstrained minority government on an even smaller share, are not easy to defend as matter of principle. There might be more Labour support for such an initiative than the party's leaders suppose.

There is more to cross-party political cooperation than whether policies can be reconciled within tolerable limits for the purpose of forming a parliamentary majority. Yet one of the principal objections on the Labour side to any thought of such cooperation is always that it would involve unacceptable compromises on policies and principles. That is an entirely respectable objection if the gulf between the two on policy is truly substantial. If Labour's general strategy in the 1980s was to offer the electorate an unambiguously socialist programme for immediate implementation, then it would indeed be difficult and probably unfruitful to cooperate. But that is not Labour's general strategy.

Labour is trying to offer a government-led economic rebuilding package aimed at getting unemployment significantly down and improving the nation's industrial base and its welfare provision. It is aiming to reinvigorate and extend democracy, strengthen civil liberties and encourage a more compassionate set of civic values. It aims to boost disarmament, support the Third World and realign Britain more independently from the superpowers. It is a programme that is open to serious criticism from the Left on the grounds that it fails to tackle fundamental inequalities and that it is too much rooted in the failed consensus of the postwar period. But it is also a programme which can be defended on the grounds that it is freshly responsive to contemporary concerns about the environment, nuclear issues, civil rights, women and race in ways which mark it out as a programme that is distinct from its predecessors.

Almost every word of this is true of the SDP-Liberal Alliance as well. If circumstances therefore suggested that the two parties might cooperate in some way for their mutual benefit, there seems little objective reason in policy terms why they should be unable to do so. Of course, there are serious difficulties of other kinds – and they are difficulties which should not be dismissed as bogus. But they do not look insuperable if that is the route that is chosen. The barriers to it are largely in people's minds. It is a matter of choice. ●

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Parent Power At The Chalkface

Kenneth Baker is appealing to parents over the heads of the teachers. **Angela McRobbie** argues that the Left ignores parents at its peril.

For well over 50 years, education was a solidly Labour issue. It was, and remains, an arena in which the Left has been passionately involved. No history of the Labour Party would be complete without an account of its record on educational reform. For the generation of parents in the 50s and 60s (my own included), a Labour vote was a vote for educational opportunity, as well as for improved health and social services. By the late 60s those outside the parliamentary Left began to stake a claim in the politics of education. Against a backdrop of Labour politicians whose educational platform seemed unwilling to rise to the challenge of 60s radicalism, the voices of teachers, activists, and academics became increasingly voluble. These were the years during which the Penguin Education series was obligatory reading for trainee teachers and social science students. Here were found the arguments of the de-schoolers, the free-schoolers, the progressivists, and the marxists.

No single field attracted more attention from the Left during this time than education. At the same time it became more and more difficult to point to any clear unity within the Left on the politics of schooling. The greater the engagement, the more fragmented the field. By the mid-70s a new urgency could be detected. Feminist critiques showed how girls had been left behind in the expansion of educational opportunity in the 50s and 60s. Working class girls in particular were channelled firmly towards motherhood and the home. Black children too seemed to fare no better under the liberal regime of multi-culturalism than they had in the old days of integration. Feminists, black activists and academics began to insist that they too must be represented within the politics of education.

However it was youth unemployment and murmurings within the Right about standards, both of which picked up a popular resonance, that prompted James Callaghan to launch his ill-fated 'Great Debate' in 1975. This attempt to regain a firm hold on education collapsed almost before it had got off the ground. It was never clear exactly who was being addressed. It lacked passion and conviction and therefore failed to capture more than a fleeting interest on the part of the public. Among left academics and activists it seemed like a step backwards towards all those 'invisible pedagogies' which had been revealed as just as restrictive as the more blatant obstacles to equality. There were fears too that Callaghan's suggestions would lead to an education system streamlined to suit the needs of industry. Teachers saw the populist rallying of the 'Great Debate' as a threat to their autonomy, an appeal made over their own heads direct to the parents.

In the last 10 years those who can be counted as within the Left on the politics of education have continued to widen and diversify. The militant action of the teachers put them firmly on the map. The local authorities, particularly those in the large urban areas, have also come to represent a strong left presence, as have black people and feminists. There has been greater involvement at the grassroots level, including the work of the school governing bodies, the PTAs, and the local wards and constituency parties.

However, it has to be said that in the rush to stake some more 'official' claim in current educational debate, the voices which have emerged and gone more or less unheeded by the Left, have arisen from within the ranks of the parents. It will be my argument that no matter how nebulous and diverse they might be, the Left, in all *its* diversity, cannot afford to ignore this body. It could be the most important of all. The history of this recent, and by no means monolithic, grouping remains to be written. There is no doubt that parents have been invoked by the media and in particular by the mass dailies for their own political purposes. To some on the Left, they are already a lost cause, won over in 1979 by the Tory election campaign poster 'Educashun Isnt Working', and never since regained as an ally. This is a dangerous assumption. Apart from anything else it allows the Right to court the parents unchallenged. It also further isolates the Left from popular feelings, not to say popular passions.

But who are the parents? In contrast with the number of times they are appealed to by the forces of the Right, it is true that they appear only fleetingly as an organised body. In a sense they *are* unorganised. But so have many new social movements been unorganised, or at least not organised in the traditional sense – the women's movement for a start. This need not consign them to political oblivion, nor should their 'lay' status deem them incapable of political involvement. Parents have indeed entered the political arena, even though their mutterings are still most loudly heard on the road home from school, and around the kitchen table over a cup of tea.

If women have become more vocal over the last 10 years about issues which affect them, why should they be expected to shut up shop outside the school gates as they hand their children over to the state? Why should we not assume that women have as much to say about what happens to their children during the long hours they spend within the confines of the school, as they have said about childbirth, the medical profession, childcare and housework. The problem is that it is not 'respectable' or admissible to speak as a parent or mother on these issues. It is necessary to don some other cap and re-emerge as a parent governor, or feminist, or party activist. I shall come back to this point

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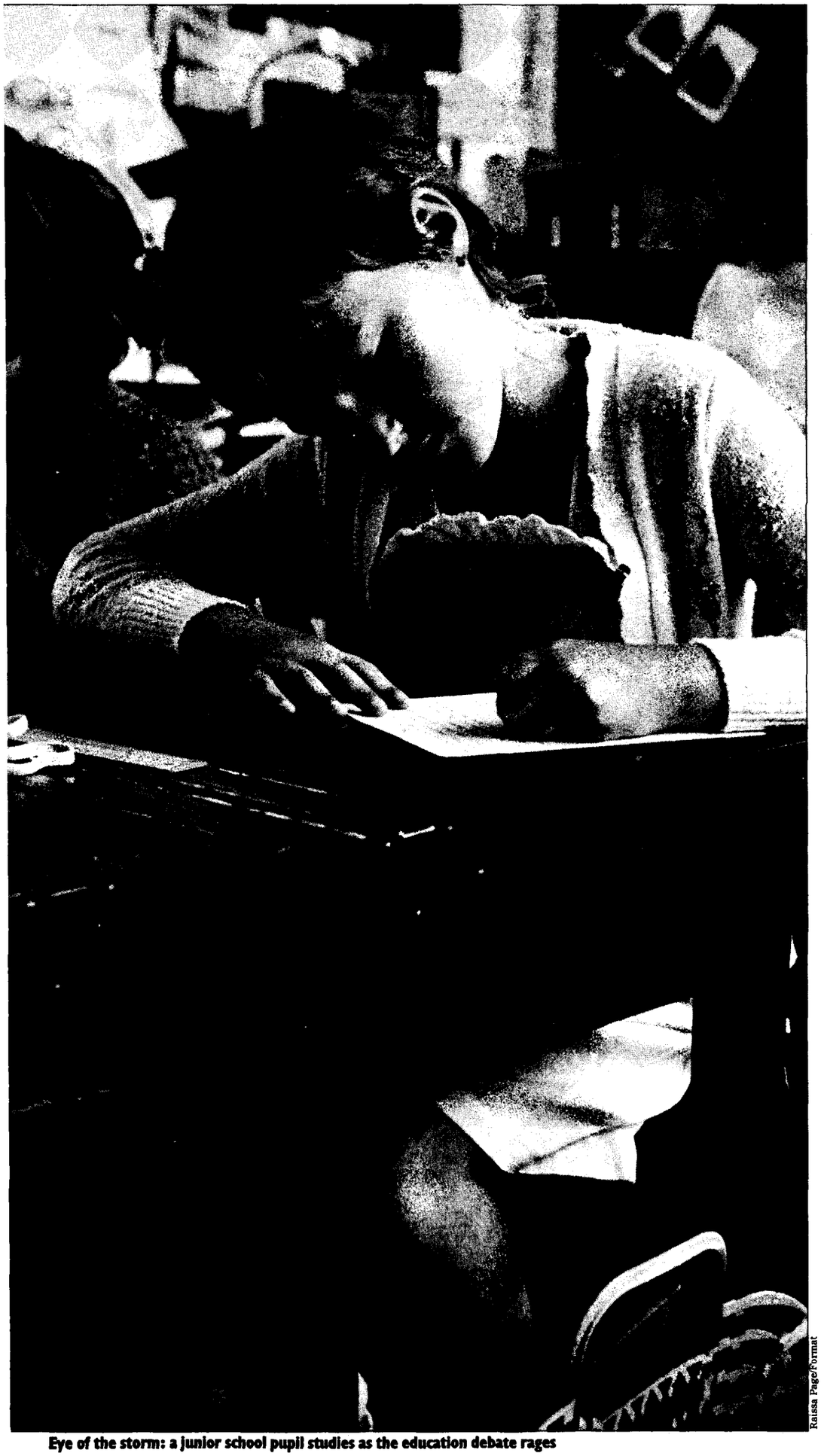

Raissa Page/Format

Eye of the storm: a junior school pupil studies as the education debate rages

later.

The issue here is that as long as parents are ignored by the Left they will remain an ideal target for campaigns of the sort currently led by Kenneth Baker. They can be appealed to directly, as they are at present with unprecedented effort. They are being courted and paid homage to by Kenneth Baker who is sweeping the ground from under the feet of the Left, with a series of well-calculated and suavely delivered gestures. With a clear determination to make his policies front page news, Baker has marked out the content and quality of education as his own terrain. (A few weeks ago, arguing in favour of a core curriculum, he insisted that all children should grow up knowing about the suffragettes and the Tolpuddle Martyrs!).

Let's not be deluded about Kenneth Baker's motives. With the teachers he is fighting a battle to limit their power and autonomy and right to negotiate. He is also extending their contractual duties, an obligation which is hardly offset by his so-called 'generous' pay offer. Ultimately Baker is working on the assumption that the teachers are a lost cause electorally. Mrs Thatcher long ago identified them as left or leftish, and it has always been part of her aim to dismantle their power. By appealing to parents over the heads of the teachers Baker is seeking to drive a wedge between the two, isolating the teachers while at the same time appearing to draw parents into the political arena.

Readers need hardly be reminded of the justice and validity of the teachers' case. As professionally qualified and highly skilled people they have been treated with contempt. A recent NUT survey compared primary teachers' salaries across 19 international cities and showed London teachers to rank 14th. The commitment and dedication of teachers has been devalued by salaries upon which many simply cannot live. Moreover cuts in education have forced them, along with the children, to spend their working days in rundown, often dilapidated buildings. Books remain unreplaced, playing fields untended and paint peels from the ceilings of the nation's classrooms.

Low salaries and the effects of cuts *are* at the heart of the crisis in education. Until they can be dealt with, the future of education looks gloomy. But even under such conditions schooling does go on. The teachers' action and the impact of cuts do not stop parents from thinking about and talking about their children's experience of school. Increasingly however the questions they want to ask seem to have no place on the Left's educational agenda. Their questions go unacknowledged, never mind unanswered. It is difficult, if not impossible, to find at present any body or grouping within the Left which is even willing to give an ear to issues on which many parents feel acutely,

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'It is difficult to find any body or grouping within the Left which is willing to give an ear to issues on which many parents feel acutely'

namely under-achievement, discipline and the quality of education.

For instance neither Frances Morrell (ILEA) nor Giles Radice (MP), two of the Left's best-known spokespersons on education, have over the last year, and often under the relatively gentle questioning of interviewers like *London Plus*'s John Stapleton, been willing to budge an inch from the narrow platform of cuts and salaries. This does not endear them to the electorate. And it comes across as defensive and evasive. Surely there has to be more to say about education than this!

While politicians can think in terms of months or years or even decades, parents, whose children are growing up in front of their eyes, cannot afford to cross their fingers and hope for better things in the future. A year is a long time in the life of a child. Three years of disruption feels to a parent like a real and substantial loss. And while the teachers' energies are invested in fighting for pay and conditions, there is little comfort for parents from the left local authorities, themselves tied up in political knots over anti-sexism and racism, or indeed from left academics, who also dismiss mutterings from the parental lobby as simply new-wave conservatism, Rhodes Boysonism.

Under such conditions parental support for the teachers becomes stretched. For those parents who have not benefited from further or higher education, the teachers remain relatively privileged. When the questions parents pose are met with condescension or dismissal by groups of teachers, governors or representatives of the local authority (whom they often perceive as left or radical), this support grows even more thin. Such treatment of parents is predicated on an assumption that only middle class or upwardly mobile parents are interested in their children's schooling. Their inquiries are regarded as symptomatic of this narrow and individualist concern. Intrusions such as these into fields of professional autonomy, such as teaching, warrant therefore the sort of replies designed to put parents off. References for example, to new methods, or to over-anxiety on the part of the parents.

The myth on the Left that working class or immigrant parents are not deeply involved in their children's education should be dislodged for once and for all. The great majority of parents want their children to come home from school brimming with ideas and with stories about what they have learnt. They want them to be set homework and, if they are capable and motivated, to be stretched, pushed and stimulated.

They also look to the school to provide children with the sort of structure which will counter the passive viewing and consumerism associated with tv and video. At a deep level they feel frustrated with talk about self-directed learning, with project work where

Parent Proposals

The National Confederation of Parent-Teacher Associations in a document last year set out ways to increase parent participation in their children's education. The confederation wants parents to have a voice (but not a vote) on education committees and subcommittees, and they want the government to provide the funding to pay full-time officials for national home-school organisations and a full-time development officer for area organisations.

It stresses the importance of home-school links, and calls upon each LEA to: appoint an advisory officer with responsibility for developing a closer partnership with parents; produce a policy paper on home-school links; and provide time for schools to release heads and teachers to enable a range of home-school activities and materials to be initiated.

teachers describe themselves as 'educational facilitators' and with repeated references to self-discipline. These are of course all the more difficult to pursue in times of educational upheaval.

From a parental point of view new methods are as likely to produce undirected and confused children as they are to come up with the confident, non-competitive, all rounders which current educational thinking promises.

For mothers and fathers, and single parents coming home after a long day at work, the prospect of endless evenings spent with bored and restless children, whose energies have been hyped up rather than used up during the school day, is not a pleasant one. Education becomes a great headache, a source of continual breast-beating and occasional despair.

We now find, ironically, stereo-typing of parental interests and attitudes even in the name of anti-racism and anti-sexism. The basic assumption is that parents are far behind on both these issues. They have to be led into these new educational arenas, and gently encouraged into the world of equal opportunities. Apart from anything else this gives parents the impression that the terms for debate have already been set in advance. There is little thought given to the fact that many parents have long since dispensed with gender stereotyping in the home and that sexism has entered the popular vocabulary as something to be challenged. (Indeed it is one of the great successes of feminism that equal opportunities and the end of old-fashioned sexism have become familiar issues in the press, on television, and on the radio.)

The result of this is that to many parents, discussion about positive images, and what goes on the library shelves, is of less political importance than the question of how their daughters are doing, how likely they are to get the sort of qualifications which will lead in the future to financial independence, and what steps the schools are taking to ensure that if they want to work, girls can get on with it, uninterrupted by boys.

The same is true for black parents who often feel that their experience as black people is invalidated in the rush to introduce new anti-racist initiatives. They see the 'welcome' signs which recent reports recommend be placed in 'prominent places' as directed at themselves, and as insulting and patronising. They also expect their queries about under-achievement and methods of assessment to be taken more seriously than they often are. Many black parents' groups describe how these questions are and have been responded to with comments about having too-high expectations or a narrowly middle class outlook.

Even on the vexed questions of discipline and standards the parental lobby deserves at least to be listened to. Overloaded with the rhetoric of the Right, these are, of course, the two most unpopular words in the educational Left's vocabulary. Yet there is a disingenuousness in such disapprobation. Learning necessarily entails the absorption of a number of disciplinary frameworks. National assessment procedures are constructed from an agreed set of standards. Many parents and children from a wide range of social and ethnic backgrounds associate standards in work and discipline in the school with a caring and concerned environment. This belief should not be treated with moral superiority or with the explanation that these are unenlightened views or amateur opinions. Once again some of the most articulate comments on these issues have come from women and from the black community.

The growth and expansion of feminist research, for example, has meant that many parents are now familiar with the extent to which teachers are often forced to devote a disproportionate amount of their time to disruptive or attention-seeking boys. Redressing this imbalance means raising questions of classroom management and control, whose point of origin is different from that of the 'old' law and order brigade. The same is true for those black parents who argue that bullying and racist behaviour is encouraged by a free and easy atmosphere in the classroom and a reliance on self-discipline. If 'lads' of the sort described by Paul Willis in his much acclaimed *Learning to Labour* can get away with mouthing obscenities at the teachers, it

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is not surprising that they also direct their aggressive macho behaviour against those peers whom they preceive as weak and inferior.

The job of reconciling these diverse and often contradictory interests is not easy. In a sense they reflect the increasing plurality and fragmentation of the spheres of public opinion and political debate. There is no easy answer to the way in which the Left will have to win back that ground it seems to have conceded on the politics of education. But this is by no means lost ground. Not many parents are completely convinced by the spurious attentiveness of Kenneth Baker. It is therefore all the more urgent that the Left shows itself willing to bend, and to listen to these voices of discontent.

It can do this first and foremost by ridding itself of two further misconceptions about parents. First that parenting involves only a fluid and temporary involvement in the politics of education, and that it is a commitment destined to fade as children approach school-leaving age. This ignores the interest in education which parents go on to have in the wider realm of the extended family. Information and advice is exchanged within most families well beyond the exclusive relationship between parents and children. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and others each feel a deep interest in the educational careers of their grandchildren, nephews and nieces. While of course parents themselves learn from the experience of an older child and use this to inform the choices they make for younger brothers and sisters.

'For those parents who have not benefited from further or higher education, the teachers remain relatively privileged'

The second mistake lies in assuming that parents are only interested in their own children. My feeling is that this has never been the case, and is even less true in the last 10 years which have seen the increasing national importance of parenting. Parenting has entered the domain of public concern and shows no sign of retreating back into the more hidden sphere of the home. It is subject to greater professional scrutiny, more extensive media debate and allocated even more column inches in women's magazines than before. Parents are encouraged to think more, and learn more, about parenting. Most importantly, changes in work patterns, the new emphasis on fathering, unemployment, and the great impact of the women's movement, on social life in general, have meant that the politics of parenting has emerged from the confined and commitments of the narrowly familial relationship.

Parents talk and get to know each other, and have other parents' children to stay the night. Their knowledge of, and interest in, children develops well beyond the ties which bind them to their own. It also extends well into the years spent in both primary and secondary education. Mothers are particularly dependent on 'rotas,' arrangements, 'favours' and other mutual reciprocities when it come to combining work with having school age children. Their involvement in the politics of schooling is as complete and as time consuming as any more traditional political commitment within the Left, even though this may only surface in attendance at PTAs. This hidden engagement is expressed more tangibly in the informal but extensive bodies of 'really useful knowledge' which work their way through the community of parents.

These networks of knowledge cover many of the important decisions made by parents on their children's behalf. They make all mothers unofficial experts on the needs, abilities, and aptitudes of a wide range of children. The devaluing of this knowledge can quite easily be seen as part of the more widespread devaluing of mothering, household labour and the work of bringing up children. But this is changing. To speak as a mother or parent is no longer to speak falteringly from within the realms of a privatised and apolitical sphere. On the contrary it is to insist that these old distinctions be done away with. Mutterings, murmurings as well as direct comments and critiques on the state of education should be welcomed by the Left. The only silence which can be justified now is that which accompanies the act of listening. ●

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It's Off To Work We Go?

Unemployment is one of Labour's strong cards. But **Veronica Beechey** argues that its case is far from convincing

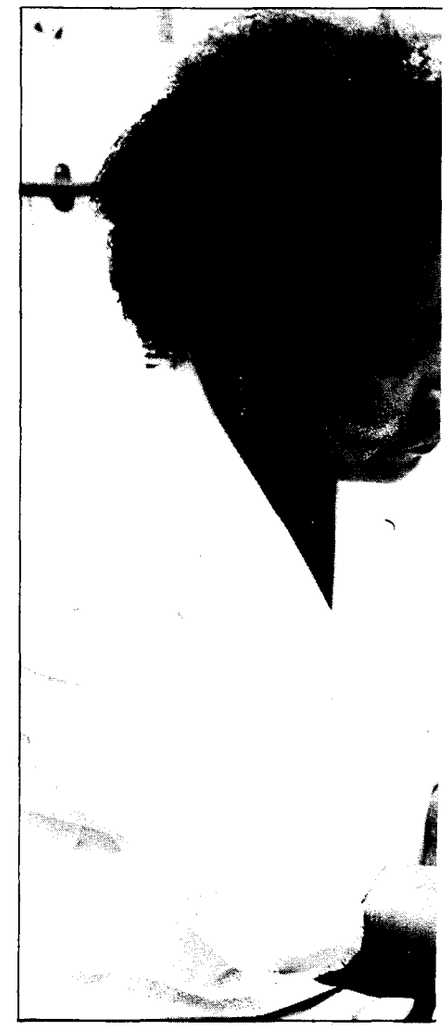
Unemployment remains extremely high – two to two and a half million higher than when the Thatcher government came into office in 1979 – and opinion polls show that many people (Tory voters included) think the government is not doing enough to reduce it. Not surprisingly, therefore, all the political parties have been gearing themselves up over the past few months for a fight about unemployment, trying to persuade the electorate that their policies will reduce it.

Despite its market ideology which asserts that both unemployment and the patterns of job loss and job creation are a 'natural' outgrowth of the play of market forces, the Thatcher government has come to recognise the importance of unemployment as an electoral issue and to realise that it must be seen to be doing something about it. It has launched a massive public relations campaign, 'Action for Jobs', whose ads are designed to persuade us that the government is 'helping us to help ourselves'.

It has also greatly expanded training places and special measures, and made a concerted attempt at getting the unemployment statistics down through a process of reclassifying who is to count as unemployed. The 'Action for Jobs' campaign is slick, professional and expensive (costing more than £30m in the 1986-87 financial year). The not-so-hidden message of the government's propaganda is that the economy is growing and jobs are available for anyone who wants one. If people are unemployed, it suggests, this is their own fault.

Both Labour and the Alliance have consistently challenged the government's claim that unemployment is falling. Labour in particular has pointed out again and again that the constant reclassification of who counts as unemployed has led to an artificial drop in the figures and has argued that very few of the new jobs heralded by the government are 'real jobs' (ie, they are mostly badly paid, insecure and part-time). Unemployment, Labour argues, is a terrible waste, especially when it exists alongside so many unmet needs. It thus proposes to create a million jobs in its first two years of office.

Labour is undoubtedly serious in its desire to get unemployment down quickly and to eradicate the poverty and demoralisation which so often accompany it. Moreover, in electoral terms, its claim to reduce unemployment is part of Labour's attempt to project itself as a caring and compassionate party. However, there are problems with Labour's thinking about unemployment and jobs. For although a good deal of thought has gone into how a Labour government can carry out the immediate task of creating a million jobs in two years, many people are clearly not convinced by Labour's arguments. They doubt that Labour will succeed in significantly reducing unemployment in the near future. This is a serious problem for Labour, especially since the Tories seem to be succeeding in getting unemployment down a little.



Two worlds: hospital domestic and Mrs Thatche

It is also linked to another problem – Labour's lack of vision of the future. Labour does not have a strategic conception of where jobs will come from nor, it seems, any sense of how work might be organised in the years to come.

It is my belief that part of Labour's weakness at the present time is due to this lack of vision and strategic longer-term thinking, an absence which is particularly problematic in a period of major social change. Both Neil Kinnock's book, *Making Our Way*, and Labour's recent publications on jobs, industrial strategy and training pay lip service to changes which have taken place in Britain over the past decade or two but they don't really build on them and develop an alternative vision to that of Thatcherism. Underneath their 'modern' tone and their commitment to 'productive democratic socialist objectives' lies a rather old-fashioned message which is more resonant of the Wilson-Callaghan era than the 1980s: revive manufacturing

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Maggie Murray/Format

'Labour's weakness at the present time is due to this lack of vision and strategic longer-term thinking'

industry, provide 'real training' and you'll get 'real jobs' plus full employment.

The realities of life in Britain today require this dull and technocratic view to be questioned because it is insufficiently aware of how things have changed in recent years and ultimately unimaginative about how work could be organised. Labour needs to develop policies which can tackle the appalling inequalities which have grown so fast in Thatcher's Britain – between the employed and the unemployed and underemployed and between different groups in the paid labour force – many of which were discussed by Charlie Leadbeater in the April issue of *Marxism Today*.

It also needs policies which can build on the changes which have taken place in recent years and which are largely (although not entirely) irreversible – the growth of service industries and decline of manufacturing, the emergence of a new spatial division of labour, the development of more flexible systems of production and widespread use of new technology, the development of new forms of work (eg, part-time work and self-employment) and decline in full-time work, and the massive growth in women's employment. The materials for thinking about how work might be organised in the future need not come from the Right, as Kinnock suggests (in *Making Our Way*) when he accuses the government of using 'post-industrial' ideals as an *excuse* for employment. They could come from the Left if only Labour would cast its net more widely and be responsive to new ideas.

Although ideologically the government continues to represent unemployment in quasi-naturalistic terms, as an outcome of the operation of market forces, it has in fact been forced to devise a whole array of measures to deal with unemployment, in order to try and convince the electorate that it is doing something about it. Like Labour the Tories want to represent themselves as a caring party which is concerned about unemployment. Unlike Labour, however, they have gone to some length to project a vision of the future which is 'modern' in tone, a vision of a bright and prosperous Britain with new industries, new technologies and new forms of work.

In the earlier days of Thatcherism the government, while acknowledging unemployment to be a problem, saw policies to combat unemployment as secondary in importance to the attempt to control inflation and keep public expenditure within tightly controlled limits. It appealed to the 'suffer now, benefit later' aspects of British culture and character. The government tried to persuade us that if the nation pulled in its collective belt in the short term, inflation would fall and the economy become more competitive. This in turn would lead to longer-term prosperity and lower unemployment. Well, inflation *has* fallen, and some sectors of the population have become more prosperous, but unemployment remains extremely high. Registered unemployment is officially just over three million, two to two and a half million higher than when the Thatcher government came into office in 1979. And the 'real' level of unemployment, if one can talk about such a thing, is considerably higher, well over four million.

Although it still proclaims that market forces in a 'de-regulated' economy will, if left to their own devices, lead to more efficiency and economic growth, and through this to new jobs, the government has in fact had to devise a whole array of measures to deal with high unemployment, especially long-term unemployment which now stands at over 40% of registered unemployment. The government's interventions on the unemployment front have been two-pronged. It has promoted training initiatives and special unemployment measures and re-classified who is to count as unemployed and able to claim benefit so that the official unemployment rate *appears* to be declining. Even Lord Young, right-hand man to Mrs Thatcher and a fervent believer in the free market and de-regulation, in the virtues of small businesses and in self-employment, has been forced to preside over a mushrooming programme of training and some limited short-term job creation in order to show that the government is doing something about unemployment. Thus, the past year has seen the extension of YTS to a two year programme, the creation of the new Job Training Scheme for the under 25s and the Restart scheme in which the long-term unemployed are counselled.

The key to recent government thinking is the distinction between short-term and long-term unemployment. While those who are employed in the short-term are believed to be able 'to look after themselves', in Lord Young's words, the long-term unemployed are thought to need assistance. Hence 'Action for Jobs'. But although there are a plethora of new schemes now in operation, the assistance offered is limited and has many strings attached. As the slogan on the 'Action for Jobs' pamphlet, 'Helping you to help yourself' suggests, the government believes that ways into the labour market exist for the long-term unemployed. The problem, they say, is not a lack of jobs but a lack of skills and/or motivation on the part of the unemployed. Thus unemployed people are coerced on to training schemes and special programmes (I have heard people talk about being 'called up' for Restart, a clear association with National Service), and on most of the schemes they receive a special allowance instead of regular benefits. They are also removed from the unemployment register.

Those who decline the schemes offered to them or who cannot find a suitable scheme are depicted as 'scroungers' and as 'workshy'. Kenneth Clarke recently said that claimants have 'melted away like snow' when called in for interview under the Restart scheme, clearly implying that they prefer to live on benefits and are unwilling to take jobs.

An important element of government policy towards unemployment is the removal of people from the unemployment register so that the official unemployment rate appears to be falling. Like the new training and special employment initiatives the 'fall in unemployment' in the latter part of last year was heralded by the government with a blaze of publicity. The recent 'rise', in contrast, was (not surprisingly) passed over in silence.

Discussions of the rise and fall in unemployment can be extremely mystifying because they are couched in narrow statistical terms. Moreover, it is hard to penetrate beneath the claims and counter-claims and get a sense of what is actually happening to unemployment. The fact is that after rising steadily throughout Thatcher's term of office the unemployment rate fell very slightly in the last three months of last year and has since risen again slightly.

According to government figures,

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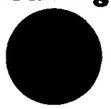
'It has reclassified who is to count as unemployed so that the *official* unemployment rate appears to be declining'



unemployment fell from its October peak of 3,162,000 to 3,119,100 in December and rose again slightly in January to 3,119,400. There is disagreement, however, between the government and independent agencies like the Unemployment Unit as to how high the 'real' level is, and how much it has fallen since the autumn (the corresponding figures from the Unemployment Unit being 3,571,900, 3,515,500 and 3,521,500).

I say 'real' in quotes because the official unemployment rate has never accurately reflected the numbers of people seeking work. This is because in Britain (unlike other countries which include all those people who are actively seeking work in the figures, whether or not they are claimants), to be classified as unemployed you actually have to be claiming benefit. The use of registration as the criterion has always meant that women have been strongly under-represented in the official count, but over the past few years the official definition of unemployment has been narrowed.

The Unemployment Unit, which has done a valuable job in charting the changes in classification, has calculated that 17 changes have been made to the basis on which the count is made since October 1979[1]. More and more people have been excluded from the official figures – people on special employment and training schemes, people seeking part-time work, and men over 60, to take just a few examples. Moreover in October of last year the government introduced a more exhaustive eligibility test for people newly registering for benefit each month. The Unemployment Unit shows that the present count is more than half a million less than it would have been if no changes in the statistics had been introduced and no expansion of special programmes had taken place since 1979. It seems clear that the official unemployment rate will fall before the General Election, but unlikely that unemployment will fall significantly.

Although publicly Department of Employment spokespeople talk about the statistical changes as a kind of 'tidying up' operation, there is no doubt that they are a major exercise in reclassification so that unemployment appears to be lower than it actually is. The government's recent claim that a million jobs have been created since 1983 reveals similar distortion and exaggeration. This is because the figure includes people on training schemes and special programmes, people holding more than one job and the self-employed, who are a notoriously difficult group to quantify.

Opinion polls suggest that people are not easily deceived by the government's public relations campaign. Only 28% of those questioned in a recent Harris poll (conducted in February) thought a Tory government would reduce unemployment. And when a previous Harris poll (in January) asked people to choose between two possible explanations for a possible downturn in unemployment, only a third of those questioned said they thought the fall would reflect the success of government policy. Over half attributed it to manipulation of figures. Moreover, when asked to choose between two possible explanations for the present consumer boom a quarter of those questioned thought it showed the economy to be improving, while nearly two thirds thought it was being used to disguise the collapse of manufacturing industry.

As polls on other issues have shown, however, while voters may be critical of specific Tory policies it does not follow that they intend to turn away from the Tories in an election. A number of polls have shown that a majority of people questioned believe the government could do more to bring unemployment down, and among those interviewed for the first of two Harris polls more Tories took a sceptical view of the consumer boom than an optimistic one. Nonetheless they still intended to vote Tory. What this disjuncture between people's views on specific policies and their professed voting intentions represents is difficult to discern. The self-interest of those in work? Desire for short-term gains over-riding longer-term conditions? The primacy of 'conviction' politics over specific policies? Whether it represents any of these, or just a lack of faith in the likelihood that Labour would do any better, it signals real problems for Labour. For it appears that many people are sympathetic to Labour's policies but are not necessarily committed to voting for them.

Labour has attacked the Tories for creating a society founded upon waste: a waste of human resources when people are out of work and a waste of money spent on the dole and special employment measures. 'Real unmet needs' are the starting point for Labour's alternative policy, 'real jobs' to meet them its solution. In an article in *The Guardian* David Blunkett says that a future Labour government's strategy would include a two-year emergency programme to cut dole queues, a five-year medium-term employment strategy built around investment in industry, the infrastructure and essential services, and a 10-year planning horizon to allow investment in employment, technology and trade. So far, however, it is the two-year emergency package which has been outlined in most detail.

Labour attacks the pessimists who suggest that there is no alternative to unemployment, the 'Jeremiahs' who think that Britain is condemned to a future of unemployment because of the pressure of competition from low-wage countries abroad and the displacement of people by new technology at home. It points out that in previous periods (the 1930s and the immediate postwar years, for instance), large numbers of jobs were created, and argues that the experience of other countries shows that unemployment need not be nearly as high as it is in Britain. Thus, Labour argues, it *is* possible to reduce unemployment if there is a government with a will to do so.

There are many questions left unanswered by the two-year jobs strategy and a number of weaknesses in its conception. It is not clear how regional differences in unemployment would be tackled and evened out, nor how private sector employers would be persuaded to create jobs which are properly paid and protected and to implement equal opportunities policies. There is also a significant absence of any discussion of workplace democracy and popular participation in the planning process from the documentation. Indeed, *New Jobs for Britain* seems to have been remarkably unaffected by the new and more imaginative ways of thinking about work and economic planning which local authorities like the GLC have pioneered (perhaps because Labour fears that its policies will be associated with the so-called 'loony Left' councils). Finally, and most importantly, Labour seems not to have taken on board the extent to which new technology and restructuring have led to job loss (especially in manufacturing industry) in recent years and the extent to which the working class has been changing.

Labour's policy is based on several highly debatable assumptions. The first is that investment in manufacturing can be a major source of new jobs. Kinnock is quite explicit in his book about the fact that manufacturing industry will have a prime role to play in job creation. 'If we put manufacturing first', he says, 'we can create jobs – real sustainable long-term jobs. And we can begin to build a better society'. Labour is undoubtedly right about the need to revive Britain's manufacturing industry, but the implication that this will lead to new jobs is questionable.

The problem is that Labour bases its analysis on the postwar years when manufacturing industry was in the ascendancy and most people were in permanent full-time jobs. This is no longer the case. For the Fordist production methods which were introduced between the wars and developed massively in the postwar years are now being transformed by new technology and new forms of work organisation. The result is that jobs are being shed at an enormous rate. Thus, while Labour is right to counter the pessimists who suggest that manufacturing is on an inexorable road to decline and to assert vigorously that Britain *can* re-industrialise, as Italy has done so successfully, it is wrong to assume that this will be a source of large numbers

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of new jobs. New jobs are far more likely to be produced by the service industries than by manufacturing.

A related assumption which is also questionable is Labour's view that only full-time jobs are 'real jobs'. Labour spokespeople often criticise the Tories because the jobs and training places which have been created while they have been in power are not 'real' ones. This criticism clearly contains some elements of truth, in that many of the new jobs which have been created in the 80s are precarious and insecure, but the criticism is often formulated in such a way that Labour appears to be opposed to part-time jobs – and by implication to women's jobs (since nearly half of women's jobs are part-time). I have frequently heard debates on the radio and television between different parliamentary spokespeople with the Tory arguing that the government has created a million jobs since 1983, and the Labour spokesperson saying 'ah, but these aren't *real* jobs, they're part-time, they're insecure' (and, by implication, they're mainly done by women). And when the reply comes, as it usually does that 'there's nothing wrong with part-time jobs ... women make very good workers and they're extremely flexible', the Labour spokesperson is floored. He (and it usually is a 'he') is floored because deeply rooted in Labour's thinking is the view that it is men's jobs that really matter, and since men work full-time and men register as unemployed, full-time jobs are a priority. It is not that Labour is consciously sexist – indeed, it has better policies on women's rights than previously. But it hasn't taken cognisance of the extent to which the structure of work has changed and the labour force has become increasingly feminised.

The final assumption which is problematic is that full employment is an over-riding social goal, and the implication which is often drawn from this that full employment can be attained in the near future. This is a major assumption of Labour's jobs policy. John Prescott emphasises Labour's commitment to full employment in his Preface to Labour's *Planning for Full Employment*. 'As socialists', he says, 'we are committed to full employment: we believe it is the guiding aim of government economic policy'. This view is also reiterated by Kinnock in *Making Our Way*. To be fair, Kinnock recognises that the postwar Beveridge notion of full employment is outmoded today and suggests a number of ways in which it needs to be redefined. 'Flexibility in the daily, yearly and lifetime distribution of time among paid employment, work outside paid employment, education and training, and leisure', he says, 'would ... enhance the quality of life ... (and) would also be more efficient than the rigid employment structure which is typical today'.

These are fine words, and certainly words many feminists and socialists would agree with, but there is little evidence that ideas like these have informed the party's thinking. With the exception of a proposal to provide statutory paid education leave for workers in permanent jobs and a 'safety-net' entitlement for adult education for the entire population, there is no sign that Labour is thinking about the organisation of work in a flexible way. No talk of sabbaticals, partial retirement or people moving between full-time and part-time work. No talk of a shorter working day or week or more flexible working time.

Any Labour government wishing seriously to tackle the question of unemployment will be faced with an extraordinarily difficult task. The number of people wanting jobs will be very high – far higher than the official unemployment statistics suggest – and there will be a lot of people (many of them unskilled and untrained) who will have been out of work for a long time. Moreover, there will be huge inequalities between different groups in the population as to whether or not they have a job, what kind of job they have and how many hours they work. In such a situation there is a strong need for radically new policies which can tackle both the immediate situation and the structure of unemployment and the labour market more generally. These need to be capable of generating jobs and of dealing with local and regional differences in the availability of jobs. They need to be able to ameliorate inequalities between those who have jobs, and they need to provide an adequate income for those people who are not in the labour market.

There are a number of areas where Labour's policies need to change. Labour needs a positive policy towards service industries rather than constantly looking to manufacturing industry as the major source of jobs. It needs to develop a positive policy towards part-time work and self-employment, and to ensure that part-time workers are given proper legal protection. And it needs to develop flexible labour market policies and turn the question of flexibility into a slogan for Labour.

Labour also needs to develop policies for the longer term which touch on the more qualitative aspects of work and can lead to change in the role of employment in people's lives. It needs to develop policies which enable people to enjoy flexibility over their working lives - flexibility to move easily between different kinds of paid work and between paid work, caring responsibilities, leisure and education. It needs to create the conditions in which there can be equal access to jobs for all – women and men, black and white, disabled and able-bodied. And it needs to consider how work can be shared out more equitably among the population and to place the question of working time centrally on its longer term agenda.

'The problem is that Labour bases its analysis on the postwar years when manufacturing industry was in the ascendancy'

Changing working time is extremely important, especially for women. Employers are currently restructuring and reorganising working time to meet their own needs for flexibility, but so far there has been little discussion of the kinds of temporal flexibility which different groups of working people themselves need. In the current climate questions like these may sound rather utopian but it is my belief that they are not inherently so. They could be part of a long-term 'radical realist' agenda which people could be mobilised around. And there are certainly precedents for thinking about policies like these in other European countries (in the policies of the West German Greens, for example) and in the practice of some local authorities here.

Work has changed enormously over the past century. In Britain 150 years ago a whole range of people – working class activists, reformers and politicians – began to agitate around questions to do with the new industrial order: the lack of opportunities for subsistence as agriculture was industrialised, the exploitation of women and children in the newly developing factories and mills, and the poor wages and immensely long hours of work in many of the factories. In the course of the 19th century a number of ideas became institutionalised which have remained more or less the same since – the notion that people (or rather men) have a right to work, to earn an independent income and not be forced into penury, the notion that men should be able to earn a family wage, and the notion of a limited and specifiable full-time working day. However, changes in material conditions have called these into question. In the 20th century we have witnessed, among other things, the development of the welfare state, the widespread employment of women, the development of a consumer society, and recently a massive restructuring of work.

It is hardly surprising, given such widespread changes, that some of the ideas put forward by radicals and reformers in the 19th century are no longer appropriate to the world today. We need new demands, new policies and new ways of thinking which can grasp the complexity of the world we live in. We need people today who, like William Morris in the 19th century, can see the possibilities which are being created by technical and social changes and who are committed to developing these for the benefit of everyone. In place of the cruel and divisive policies of Thatcherism and the technocratic and backward-looking visions of Labour we need new visions and new policies – visions and policies which will carry Labour and the Left forward into the 21st century. ●

[1]The Unit's excellent analysis of government policies can be found in the quarterly *Unemployment Bulletin* available from 9 Poland St, London W1V 3DG.

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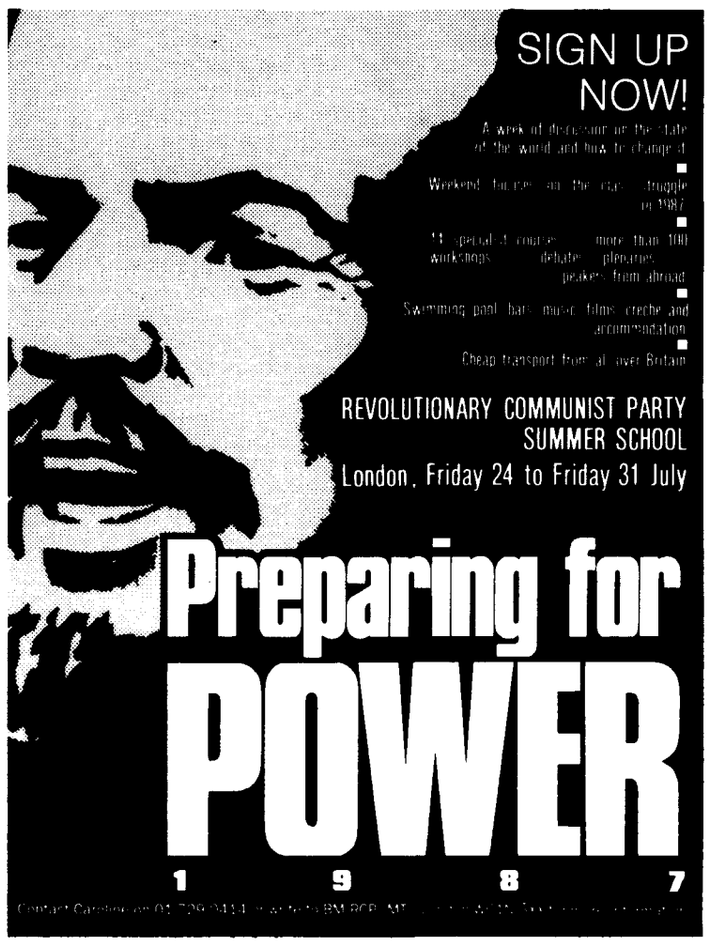

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Quiet Death Of N-Power

The government has given Sizewell the go-ahead. But **Colin Sweet** argues that the Tories are likely to abandon nuclear power

Aftermath: clearing up after Chernobyl

What effect has the Chernobyl factor had in the UK? For the government, none at all. Because the Soviet type of reactor, the RBMK, is of a different design, it is argued that the disaster has no bearing on Sizewell 'B'. Even if that were true, it overlooks the fact that Three Mile Island, which also came close to a core meltdown, is of similar design to Sizewell B. Lord Marshall's statement that 'It couldn't happen here', made even before the causes of the Chernobyl disaster were known, is either a truism, because we do not have that type of reactor in the UK, or it is meant to suggest that major accidents cannot happen in the UK. The latter interpretation, widely projected in order to reassure people, is testimony of the irresponsible nature of the nuclear industry. The Nuclear Installations Inspectorate, which more accurately reflects the nuclear industry's interest than the public interest, has endorsed this view, and so has Peter Walker.

The Chernobyl accident released an enormous amount of radioactivity into the atmosphere. The estimate of a possible 2,000 deaths in Europe from cancers, made by the National Radiological Protection Board, must be regarded as a serious understatement. As to the cost, the Soviet authorities put the destruction of the reactor at $2.7 billion (July 20 1986). To this must be added the costs of modifying all the other reactors of the same type to improve their safety and the cost of evacuating 135,000 people from the Chernobyl area, plus the fallout in surrounding countries. In Sweden and Norway, for example, 55,000 reindeer were slaughtered last year. An estimate of $5 billion (FT Energy Economist Sept 1986), for the Soviet Union alone, seems more realistic.

Despite these high costs, the lessons of Chernobyl have not been learnt. There is, as yet, no inherently safe design for a nuclear reactor. There are deficiencies in both the training and staffing of reactors in the UK. The context in which this technology can be managed to the necessary standards of safety does not yet exist. Probability studies, carried out by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in America, suggest that the chance of a further serious accident in the next 20 years is fifty/fifty. The problem is now an international one. There is no effective international mechanism for dealing with it. The International Atomic Energy Authority has neither the power nor the will to perform such a role. While seeking to monitor nuclear power, it is also concerned to promote it.

What does emerge from the Sizewell debate and the government decision is that economic interests are paramount. Concerns for safety and health can, and often are, pushed to the margin, when the future of a multi-billion pound industry is threatened – albeit as a result of its own technological failures. From a broader perspective, the use of economic criteria in evaluating nuclear power does have the merit that, unlike safety, it can be subjected to some form of recognisable quantitative testing, such as investment appraisal, cost benefit analysis, or where it exists, market competition. By comparison quantitative estimations of safety and risk are notoriously subjective.

As a result of the experience of public inquiries in particular, it is possible to approach the problem of decision-making in this field by taking the view that, if the first requirement is that nuclear power has to meet the test of economic viability, it is then possible to approach the more difficult question of safety. This is the approach that Layfield adopted in his report on Sizewell B. 'If consent is to be given to Sizewell B' he said, 'the disadvantages of risks to health and safety and of the environmental damage to the Sizewell locality must be outweighed by anticipated economic benefits to the nation'. That is an acceptable analytical framework, for the reasons already given. Moreover the difficulty of deciding what is safe may never arise if the programme fails the economic test.

In practice economics and safety are in certain respects closely related. The first PWR design submitted to the CEGB (the so-called April '81 design) was rejected, so it is reported, on the grounds that the extra safety measures built into it made it unable to pass the test of commercial viability. So high was the cost that no massaging of the

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Frank Spooner Pictures

figures would have made it competitive with coal-fired stations. In the United States, the rising cost of safety requirements has been one of the key factors that has priced nuclear power out of the market.

A third requirement that many would now insist should be placed alongside economics and safety, is that the would-be nuclear constructor must show that there is an acceptable method of waste disposal. In practice this requirement is accepted in a number of European states. This means that a licence to build a reactor is not granted unless it can be shown that the waste can be satisfactorily disposed of – a requirement that is met usually, if at all, by exporting it to Sellafield or Cap la Hague in France. But the cost is high. Waste disposal solutions cannot be abstracted from either safety or economics. Which is why the deceptively simplistic solutions of the nuclear industry to dump it in the sea, or in holes in the ground, have run into such strong opposition.

'What effect has the Chernobyl factor had in the UK? For the government, none at all'

Overall there does not exist an acceptable basis for decision-making about nuclear power – hence the growing mistrust on the part of the public, as the gap between public perceptions and the practices of the nuclear industry widen.

Notwithstanding the emergence of serious accidents as an international problem, is Britain about to embark upon a new nuclear programme?

The decision of Peter Walker on Sizewell, taken on March 12, has been interpreted as the beginning of a programme worth between £6 and £15 billion (in 1984 prices) depending on the size of the programme. But there was no parliamentary vote for this or any other nuclear programme, and Walker studiously avoided any commitment beyond giving the required statutory consent for the CEGB to proceed, although he was invited by Layfield to do so.

It could no doubt be argued that the low key approach of the government is no more than a matter of political expediency: 'there are no votes in nuclear power'. Given that none of the three opposition parties would have adopted Layfield's recommendation, it can be argued that the government is simply being prudent, both in avoiding a full parliamentary debate and in not committing itself to anything more than a minimum programme. Equally it can be said that the CEGB, in deciding to go for a nuclear/coal mix in its station ordering programme, is ensuring that it will have new coal capacity coming on line by 1995, as an offset against the time/cost overruns which are a normal hazard associated with nuclear plant – especially with a new design as yet untried.

It is argued by some writers that this minimalist approach is no more than a recognition by the government of the political fallout from Chernobyl. That it is seeking, by its decision in March, to build two more coal-fired stations to restore something of a consensus, including within the TUC which is seriously divided on the coal versus nuclear debate. If there is to be an autumn election, a decision by the TUC to come broadly into line with the government and the CEGB on this programme, and eschew the Labour Party's programme for phasing out, might help to rescue nuclear power from being thrust into the unwelcome controversy of the political arena and save the government some votes.

If this reasoning is correct, then it could be argued that the apparent difference between the government and the nuclear industrial lobby is only one of tactics. After the general election, pressure to agree to a 'small family' of PWRs will be resumed with full force and with the backing of Whitehall.

An alternative view is that what we are witnessing is the beginning of the end of nuclear power in the UK. If that is the case it cannot just be put down to the Chernobyl factor, important as that has been in influencing public opinion. If there is a policy divergence, and if Whitehall is less than enthusiastic about a multi-billion pound nuclear programme, then it would now be beginning to dig its heels in. The Sizewell inquiry may be seen as part of that process. Hence the time taken: four years, delaying the start-up date for the first PWR from 1983 to late 1987. Hence the extraordinary delay by the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate to produce their safety report (still not delivered although originally expected

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in late 1982!).

It came as a surprise at the Sizewell inquiry that Nigel Lawson (then Energy Secretary) allowed his witness to be cross-examined on the merits of government policy (something not normally permitted) at the opening of the inquiry. The only significant statement that the government made was that the decision of December 19, 1979 to build 10 large PWRs no longer stood. Once that commitment was relaxed, the inquiry as a generic study of the case for a commercial-based nuclear programme was adrift. And the Board revised its claim to a 'small family' of PWRs.

'Since 1978 no nuclear reactor of any kind has been ordered in the US'

To argue that Sizewell is the beginning of the end is of course speculative. It should be noted, however, that it is not necessarily inconsistent with a decision to build Sizewell 'B'. Given Mrs Thatcher's enthusiasm for nuclear power when she came into office in 1979, there was no way that the government could back away from building at least one PWR.

American experience is instructive. In 1977 Carter suspended the fast reactor programme for political reasons. By 1978 it was becoming apparent that a policy decision had been taken to abandon the fast reactor completely. Implicitly this meant phased withdrawal from nuclear power, but it took eight years, and several billion dollars, before the programme was stopped. (That, said the secretary of the joint committee on economic policy of the US congress, 'is the price of getting the fast reactor lobby off our backs').

The British way of doing things is different. We had to go through the public inquiry process, but if there was the intention to pull the rug from under the big nuclear programme lobby, the process had its merits because it delayed the decision. The length of the inquiry and the tardiness of the NII in providing a licence has allowed much water, usefully, to flow under the bridge. In 1981 the government dropped the proposal to build a UK fast reactor of commercial size (expected in the 1980s or 90s) and relegated it to the remoteness of the next century. Was Britain to follow the American example?

Since 1978 no new nuclear reactor of any kind has been ordered in the US. (This explains some of the urgency displayed by Westinghouse, the main constructor of PWRs, in seeking a foothold in the UK, in order to develop an export potential to other countries via a UK licensee). The downturn in orders for nuclear reactors began in the States in 1974 and in the short space of four years the market for new reactors collapsed and many plants ordered were cancelled. While it may therefore be speculative to suggest that Sizewell may not be followed by any other nuclear stations, leading as in other countries to an effective, if unstated, moratorium, there is no doubt about its collapse in the United States. It should be noted that this collapse began before the accident at Three Mile Island. The reason was cost. Nuclear power was not competitive. Underlying this market failure were a number of problems: technological, managerial, political, financial. Significantly the marginal factor which pushed costs above the price of alternative strategies was the rising cost of making reactors safe.

A Guide To Nuclear Reactors

Magnox Reactor. Uses natural uranium and will operate at a low power output and therefore are safer to operate.

Advanced Gas Cooled Reactor (AGR). Uses enriched uranium, technically more efficient but complicated and difficult to operate.

Pressurised Water Reactor (PWR). Advanced reactor but operates under high pressure and are therefore more dangerous.

Fast Breeder Reactor (FBR). Uses plutonium reprocessed from the waste of the other three thermal reactor types and are exceptionally difficult to operate safely and economically.

Increasingly it appears that American experience is being generalised across the industrial world. The only countries likely to buy nuclear reactors are Third World countries, and then only on generous credit terms. For the UK this process is being accelerated, ironically, by the presence of a government powerfully wedded to shifting resources into the market and away from the state sector. While it does not share the anti-nuclear power stance of its opponents, effectively it may prove to be antipathetic because of its dislike of nationalised industries.

For Labour and the unions this poses an acute dilemma. The industrial structures set up in the late 40s have become a refuge for the nuclear industry. If a Labour government is to attack nuclear power it will have to take on one of the biggest corporate sectors in the economy. To break up those structures, it will antagonise the unions within the industry, and pose the question of what should replace or displace the relevant nationalised industries.

Having said that, it does seem that the winds of change are already blowing across the face of the electricity supply industry. There is a coming together of separate and in some respects divergent interests. Public hostility to nuclear power, Treasury hostility to the big spenders who would add to the size of the PSBR with large capital expenditures, and more recently the growing appetite for privatisation. At one time, the latter was thought a remote possibility in the electricity sector. But now it appears that many more than just the radical Right think that it can be digested.

Nevertheless despite the eagerness to privatise electricity along the lines of British Gas, the re-location of nuclear power from its present protected position will not be easy. It is not only the corporate structure but its special place within the government machine, which is an obstacle. Also the sheer size of the economic interests involved will make it the biggest restructuring exercise attempted so far. The original 10 station PWR programme would have cost around £15 billion, spread over 15 years. One of the lessons which Nigel Lawson and others have learnt from the US is the very high price to be paid for nuclear-derived electricity, which can be generated from other fuels, such as coal, at a lower cost and risk.

The true economic cost of nuclear power has never been computed. In round figures the capital requirement has so far been in excess of £12 billion, and could rise by £2 billion for each PWR, to £24-£44 billion, if nuclear power was progressively to displace coal in a big station programme. The opportunity cost of the R & D cannot be quantified, but the expenditure of at least £4 billion to date, rising to over £6 billion if a commercial fast reactor is built, has been a hidden drain on the economy. The drain on labour is also important. The deployment of skilled engineers and scientists can be estimated at around 20,000 out of a current total workforce of 37,880 (the remainder are in clerical and other grades).

To assess the full economic cost, estimates also have to be made of the benefits foregone by the large scale deployment of capital and labour, yielding returns well below the average of manufacturing industry. A full appraisal should identify operating losses, the hidden R & D costs and other subsidies. Unless and until the books are opened the true cost can only be hazarded.

The manner in which the economics of nuclear power are massaged when it comes to policy-making has become endemic. Even a man as perceptive and industrious as Sir Frank Layfield appears to have missed the point, that the CEGB data produced during the Sizewell inquiry showed quite clearly that the Magnox stations are currently operating at a loss. It is also evident, from official statistics, that the AGR stations have totted up such huge losses that they will never be able to pay for themselves.

The CEGB have been successful in conducting the discussion about the supposed cost-effectiveness of nuclear

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power almost entirely in terms of the future, at the expense of ignoring the present and the past. Both Layfield and Walker repeat this error. Nevertheless, despite the blind eye that they turn to current costs, they have felt obliged to reject the manner in which the Board used future fuel prices. Layfield's sharpest criticism was addressed to the Board's assumptions of high coal and oil prices by the end of the century. The difference between those estimates and ones based on current prices is impressive. What the Board presented as a large benefit turns out to be a substantial loss.

There can therefore be no economic grounds for building Sizewell. This was partially recognised by Layfield who pulled down CEGB prices to the 1984 level. On current prices, however, to build Sizewell would incur a penalty of half a billion pounds over the lifetime of the reactor. Faced with this situation Walker has abandoned the somewhat absurd Layfield statement that there was only a one in 40 chance that a coal-fired station would be cheaper, and reduced the odds to one in seven. Such are the attributes that vice pays to virtue.

If privatisation is to take place how will this affect the future of nuclear power? It does present some considerable problems. Firstly, its track record of persistent loss-making will make it impossible to sell to the City. Dungeness 'B', the worst case, has so far cost around £4 billion and it is still not fully commissioned, after 21 years of construction. Hartlepool and Heysham 'A' are not much better. No-one would put any money on Torness and Heysham 'B' until they have got over their present teething troubles (if that is what they are).

Neither is it likely that privatisation could be carried through on the model of British Gas. Electricity is far less homogenous and more complex, and it is about twice as rich in terms of assets than Gas. To break it up, however, will not be easy either, especially if nuclear power increases in size. The close interdependence with coal will call for new planning mechanisms and pricing policies that are a better reflection of the real cost of coal. There is also the problem of insurance in the event of an accident. No private insurance cover is available for nuclear accidents and this must remain covered by government guarantees with EEC backing.

There is the problem of decommissioning. This has yet to be attempted. Currently the CEGB estimates that it may take 100 years to decommission, at least the first stations. The estimated costs of decommissioning a Magnox station (which are relatively small) is between £150 and £270 million. This is approximately half the original construction cost.

'While the government does not share the anti-nuclear power stance of its opponents, it may prove to be anti-pathetic because of its dislike of nationalised industries'

Finally there is the political problem. Nuclear power is a part of the nuclear capability of would-be important world powers. The plutonium connection with the US defence programme as well as with the UK weapons programme may not be a well-kept secret, but it is a secret nonetheless. How would this fit into a privatised industry?

None of these problems have interfered with the process of phasing out nuclear power in other countries, or effectively dislodging it in the United States from its once dominating position. In the UK as in France, electricity supply has developed in the context of a high degree of centralisation and corporate power.

Restructuring electricity supply into a competitive market environment would be different from the processes of change that take place in less centralised economies, for example the United States and Scandinavia. Without the protective structure, it is doubtful if nuclear power would have been able to sustain itself, in the face of its track record of costly accidents and environmental hazards. Should the protective structure be stripped away, then nuclear power is unlikely to survive. This interaction of complex motives and interests is one that the labour movement will have to examine with care if it is to effectively dismantle nuclear power. For the would-be privatisers, selling off the family silver will also involve some hard choices. ●

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Enduring into the eighties: Cilla Black hosting LWT's Surprise! Surprise! show

Cilla The Survivor

Cilla Black was unfashionable after the first few months of her career. This did not harm her popularity. She was destined for much larger audiences than that which clustered around the telly on a Friday evening to observe the rise of the younger and cooler to a nonce stardom. Cilla came to us through this teen revolution in television but she was not essentially a product of it; she was identified with the Beatles yet she was quickly left behind by them. She marked the end of a northern renaissance rather than a beginning.

Yet out of a few tv appearances Cilla was able to develop a career. What is striking about seeing her on those early *Ready, Steady, Go!* programmes is that the vaguely comic walk was already there – not side-splittingly comic but just enough to know that this person was not entirely serious. It was this innate funniness that led to her eclipse as a pop star; she sang, after all, heavily emotional teen ballads for which a wistful or lacrimose beauty was needed. Cilla, while fashionably emaciated, was not wistful or lacrimose enough for those times.

The advent of Sandie Shaw and Marianne Faithfull ended the pop-Cilla and announced the arrival of all-round-entertainment-Cilla. It is now difficult to think of Cilla and Sandie as belonging to the same generation: while Sandie has grown up in a strictly southern world of designer clothes and designer motherhood and designer Buddhism, Cilla has aged into glittery hostess frocks, northern family life and has retained her Catholicism. The brief attempt to link the typing pool in Liverpool with the cool world of *Ready Steady Go!* mods ended quickly but lucratively.

A sudden change from a whisper to a scream made Cilla Black's voice infamous; it was an effective but unmusical noise that belonged to no recognisable tradition of vocalisation but it was perceived in those quaint days of 1963 as being 'black' (and hence the change of surname from White to Black which was suggested by Brian Epstein). Still, having two bad voices does not compensate for the lack of one good one and Cilla has today almost abandoned singing (a Cillagram is somehow not serious singing).

Now, many of the fans of her two tv shows will never have heard her hit singles, being either too old or too young and the young might even think that singing is a kind of running joke in Cilla's act, like the violin in Jack Benny's. Cilla was only a little ruffled when a recent participant on *Surprise! Surprise!* told her that he couldn't stand her singing, a comment that the audience applauded enthusiastically.

Cilla always proclaimed that her ambition was to be an entertainer rather than a pop star, although this was not an ambition admired in Swinging London: the groove gouged out between London and LA did not take in Las Vegas, let alone Blackpool. In an age of high specialisation Cilla assigned herself a lengthy retraining in thigh-slapping and that rhythmic strolling which when accompanied by a troupe of enthusiastic and strong young men, passes in some quarters of show business for dancing. An amazingly successful stint at the London Palladium with Frankie Vaughan, an artiste she admired greatly, was followed by cabaret, panto and summer season.

During this period Cilla revealed a talent for telling jokes and chatting to the audience. This drove her perilously to the naffest end of the market but also underlined her closeness to her working class origins and to earlier, pre-telly, entertainment. In this, only her freshness and absolute sincerity have prevented her from being a female version of Jimmy Tarbuck.

This class identification could have been perceived as demeaning in her early ventures into comedy. Frankie Howard's pretentions to middle-classness were offset by Cilla: 'Common as muck!' he'd exclaim as Cilla giggled at his side. This self-deprecation has gone and these days Cilla is self-confident and comfortable; we feel comfortable with her, sure that we will not be patronised.

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She maintains a steady progress into the living rooms and hearts of the British public in the way that few stars have done – Diana Dors has, Gary Glitter will; Gracie Fields did and she vetoed Cilla as a candidate to play her in a projected bio-pic. (Where 'Our Gracie' mimicked her class origins – doing a

Aquarius

Cilla: sixties swinger

'turn' in a head scarf, Cilla seems content to present her audiences with an undistorted self-portrait. Perhaps it is this which worried Gracie Fields: Cilla has no visible means of support in front of her audiences, no visible talent to perfect or prop up.)

Years of panto have given Cilla Black a cheeky way with innuendo that adds camp to her act and which gives her control over wayward audiences ('I'll fix your wagon, chuck...'). Hers is an act at the height of its appeal, with a perfect sense of 'rightness' about it: image, rapport, comfort. Very few entertainers maintain this for long; comfort can be replaced by discomfort, fascination by ennui. Television careers have faltered at this stage before now – Charlie Drake, Ken Dodd, Bruce Forsythe, Tony Hancock – and often a season in hell and a comeback are seen as the only ways that the British public will forgive success. Cilla's progress has been easy; long may it continue to be so! Still, perhaps she should fight off the funny phones and take a cabaret again. ●

Colin Cruise

A Clydeside Renaissance

Jews call it chutzpah, in Glaswegian it translates as 'gallus', and in either it stands for that quality of shameless audacity which is largely engaging and often wholly inexplicable.

Glaswegians would argue that these days there is much to be gallus about. To the merriment of British comedians, and the chagrin of other British contenders such as Edinburgh, Glasgow was recently confirmed as the European City of Culture for 1990, following Florence, Amsterdam, Berlin and Paris. For those people who have no contemporary knowledge of Scotland's largest city, those whose image of it is trapped in a time warp of 1930s razor gangs, the nomination may have seemed faintly ludicrous.

Yet with due respect to Edinburgh and its glittering annual arts festival, its industrial cousin, 44 miles west, has emerged in many respects as the arts capital of Scotland – at least in the sense that it houses the headquarters of all the major arts organisations.

Scottish Ballet, Scottish Opera, and the Scottish National Orchestra are all based in Glasgow, the latter now promised a new £20m concert hall in time for the 1990 programme. Added to the input of the various galleries led by the Burrell, and the theatre companies which include the internationally-respected Citizens, it allowed Glasgow to argue a realistic case for selection, not the least of which was that 1990, in the normal course of events, could be expected to generate some £24m worth of arts spending in the city.

Yet the committee which presented Glasgow's case to the Office of Arts and Libraries was more than a little disconcerted to find that the first inquiry was whether Glasgow's 'negative image' might deter incoming visitors. In fact tourism to Glasgow is today a major growth industry, having risen from 700,000 to 2m visitors in the two years following the high profile 'Glasgow's Miles Better' campaign. Asked what it could claim to be better than, the then Lord Provost, Michael Kelly, was wont to retort: 'than it used to be'.

Of that there is little doubt. A series of city redevelopments, known in planning department shorthand as the 'string of pearls', are in the midst of a major transformation of many parts of Glasgow. They include the river Clydeside site of the 1988 garden festival, various city centre shopping and leisure complexes, the renovation of the East End and the area in which the concert hall will sit. A unique component of the physical rebirth has been the stone-cleaning project which allowed intricately decorated Victorian sandstone tenements to emerge from their soot-laden overcoats.

But perhaps the most telling illustration of the new spirit and confidence of city centre Glasgow is that area of once derelict warehouses close to the city chambers which have metamorphosed into new inner city housing under the umbrella of a 'Merchant City' label. Seduced by the invitation to participate in this 'regeneration' project, I duly purchased what New Yorkers might more grandly call a loft in the top of one of the converted warehouses. Many of our neighbours are in their early twenties, able to break into a home ownership market which allows them to buy the 1980's equivalent of a small 'trendy pad' for as little as £24,000. Enough to make the average London mortgagee weep.

These youngsters are 'upwardly mobile' only in the sense of being working class kids – hairdressers and shop assistants and clerks – who have often moved into the city from the depressing peripheral housing schemes still occupied by their parents. But there is also increasing evidence of middle class professionals – the more 'yuppie' elements – in retreat from the suburbs, attracted by the other growth industry of the Merchant City ... the wine bars and bistros and promised shopping piazzas which were once the exclusive preserve of the West End dweller.

The Merchant City, and the East End refurbishment under the auspices of a renewal scheme which soaked up some £300m worth of public funds, are illustrations of Glasgow District Council's unblushing partnership with private housing enterprise. The first private houses in the heart of the remodelled East End were put up by a Liverpool builder, but indigenous companies have followed. Similarly private developers have been encouraged to venture into some of the worst of the housing scheme ghettos to create owner occupier oases in deserts of poorly repaired public sector housing.

These estates, built postwar with good intentions and

Glasgow's Tolbooth Steeple

blinkered implementation, represent the downside of Glasgow's new success story. For a third of Glasgow's 750,000 residents are still marooned in these outposts, too far from the centre to imbibe the heady air of confidence engulfing the inhabitants of the revitalised inner city. Built largely without social amenities, they have gamely fought a rising

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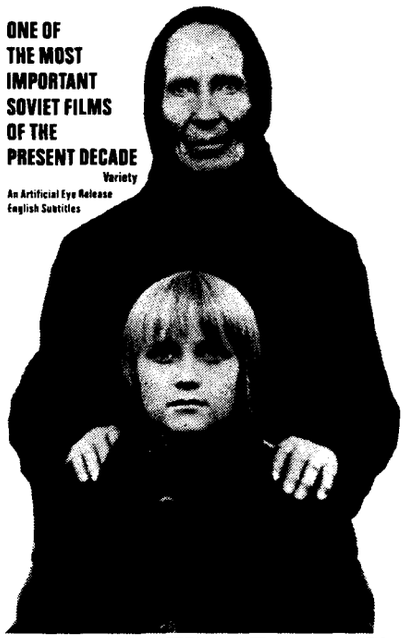

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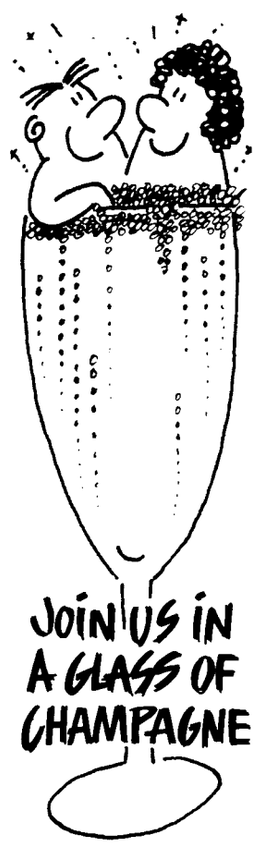

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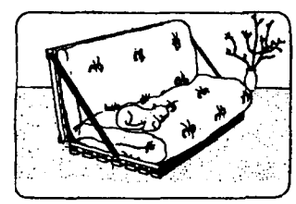

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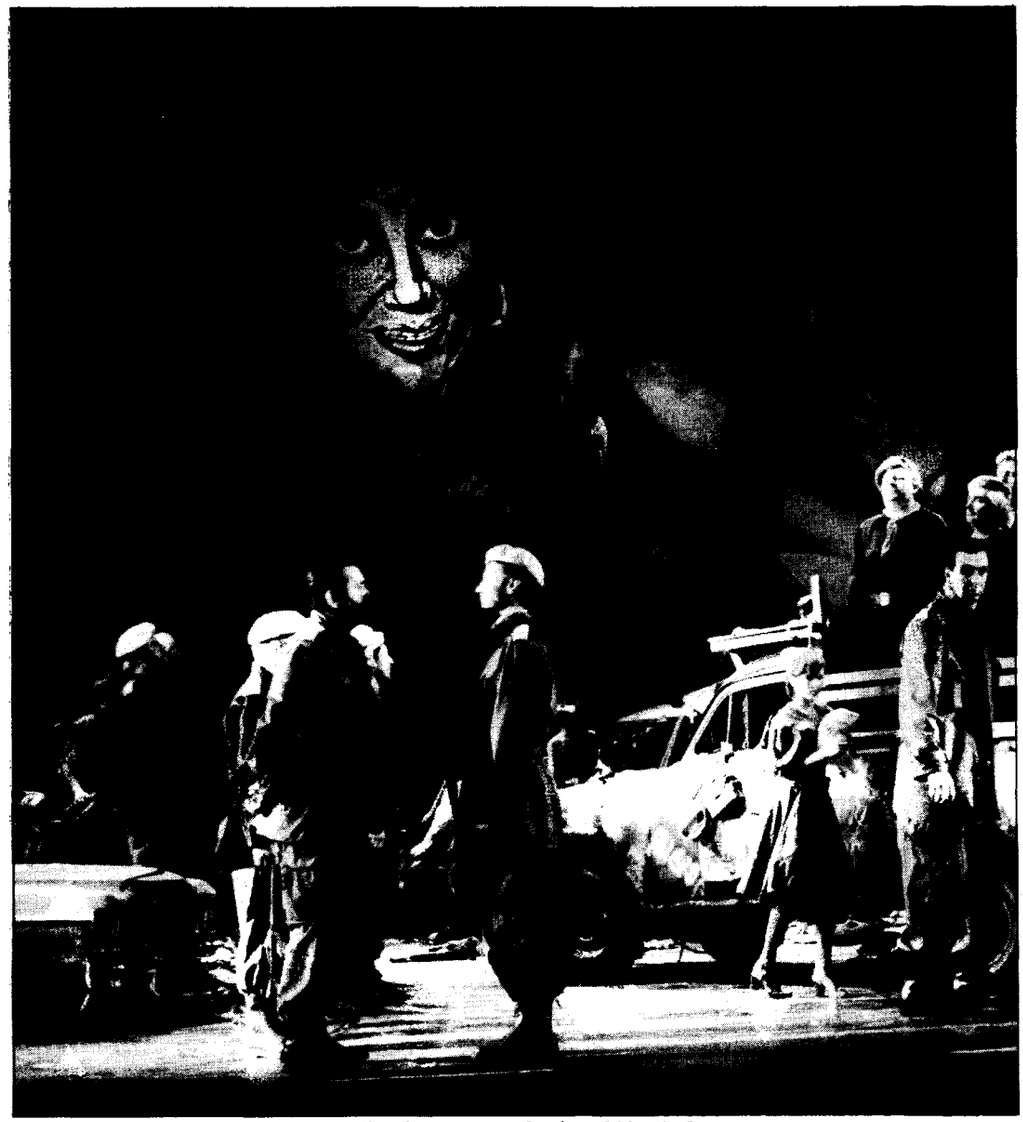
unemployment rate and a tendency of officialdom to create ghettoes of 'difficult families'. The struggle is an unequal one and in many such streets an unemployment rate of 45% is not uncommon. These housing schemes are the physical proof that only a part of Glasgow is yet 'miles better' and that the mountain still to climb is as daunting as ever before.

Yet even here there is evidence of new enterprise with organisations like Heatwise making a twin-pronged attack on poor insulation and local unemployment rates by training locals to upgrade housing. The ruling Labour group in the District Council, bolstered by a massive and impregnable majority (the city no longer has even a solitary Conservative member of parliament), has sought ways to reconcile the two Glasgows which have emerged from its postwar attempts at renaissance. Mayfest, the five-year-old arts festival, has a thriving community element, the thrust of which is to involve the further flung communities. Visiting companies tour the housing estates, whilst local drama groups are given the opportunity of city centre venues and professional expertise. The dramatic centrepiece – this year *The Gorbals Story* directed by David Hayman – has in the past brought audiences into the Citizens Theatre who are clearly making their theatre-going debut.

Glasgow, the 'dear green place', is no longer that, although paradoxically this most industrial of cities boasts more parkland than almost any major European town. But it is, as many of its more enthusiastic immigrants will testify, an exciting place; a city which has rediscovered its sense of self-worth. Historian John Prebble, in his 1984 book on Scotland asserted that: 'It is hard to love Glasgow, unless one is born there and perhaps not always then'. In the space of three short years that judgement has become quite dramatically dated. ●

Ruth Wishart



Modern tragedy: the recent English National Opera's production of Bizet's Carmen

Carmen's Modern Message

'I am convinced that in 10 years *Carmen* will be the most popular opera in the whole world.' So wrote Tchaikovsky, not long after *Carmen* had its first performance in Paris in 1875. Not a difficult prediction to make, you might think, about an opera so obviously, even blatantly, tuneful and picturesque. But in fact the work was not well received at first, either by critics or audiences. Critics attacked the new opera as dull, undramatic and lacking in melody. Bizet was deeply depressed by the premiere: 'I sense defeat. I foresee a definite and hopeless flop', he is said to have told some of his friends.

The composer never lived to witness its subsequent phenomenal success. He died, aged 36, three months after the first night. A few months later *Carmen* was staged in Vienna, where it was praised by both Brahms and Wagner, two composers who otherwise had little in common. From then on *Carmen* has never really looked back, and Tchaikovsky's prediction very nearly came true.

More than a century later its musical reputation and its popularity stand as high as ever. In this season alone both Scottish Opera and English National Opera have staged new productions, and Kent Opera and Welsh National Opera (WNO) have put on revivals. There has been one recent film version, and another is on the way. How many versions of *Carmen* can the market take? It is hard to say, but there is no sign of any falling off in demand. How are we to explain this extraordinary and perennial success?

Part of the answer is very simple: *Carmen* is a very

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good opera. It is as much admired by musicians as it is loved by the musical public. Of course, not all good operas are popular, and not all popular operas are good. We all know operas in which the magnificence of the music has to contend with the absurdities and inconsistencies of the plot – Verdi's *Il Trovatore* is a case in point. Some, like Weber's *Oberon*, have even been wrecked by a ludicrous libretto. The words and the story do matter in opera. It is a form of drama, and to be wholly successful, it needs at least a coherent story line, and above all credible characters with credible feelings.

The libretto of *Carmen* is one of the best ever written. The story, and the characters, are clear, credible and convincing. The structure of the work is economical and logical, and Bizet's music brings the characters and their conflicts to life at every moment. It is a strong work, not essentially dependent on the Spanish local colour of which too much has been made in the past. It can therefore stand a variety of interpretations, and translating it to 50s America, as has been done at the Coliseum, or to a vaguely Latin American revolution, as Lucian Pintilie has done for WNO, is not necessarily a gimmick or a distraction – as some conservative music critics complain. On the contrary, it may cast new light on a work which can otherwise come to seem too familiar, too comfortable.

And *Carmen* is not a comfortable work. Or shouldn't be. Particularly not for men. Conventionally Carmen is seen as a *femme fatale*, the heartless hussy who breaks men's hearts, in this case, Don José's. But she gets her come-uppance, albeit rather nastily.

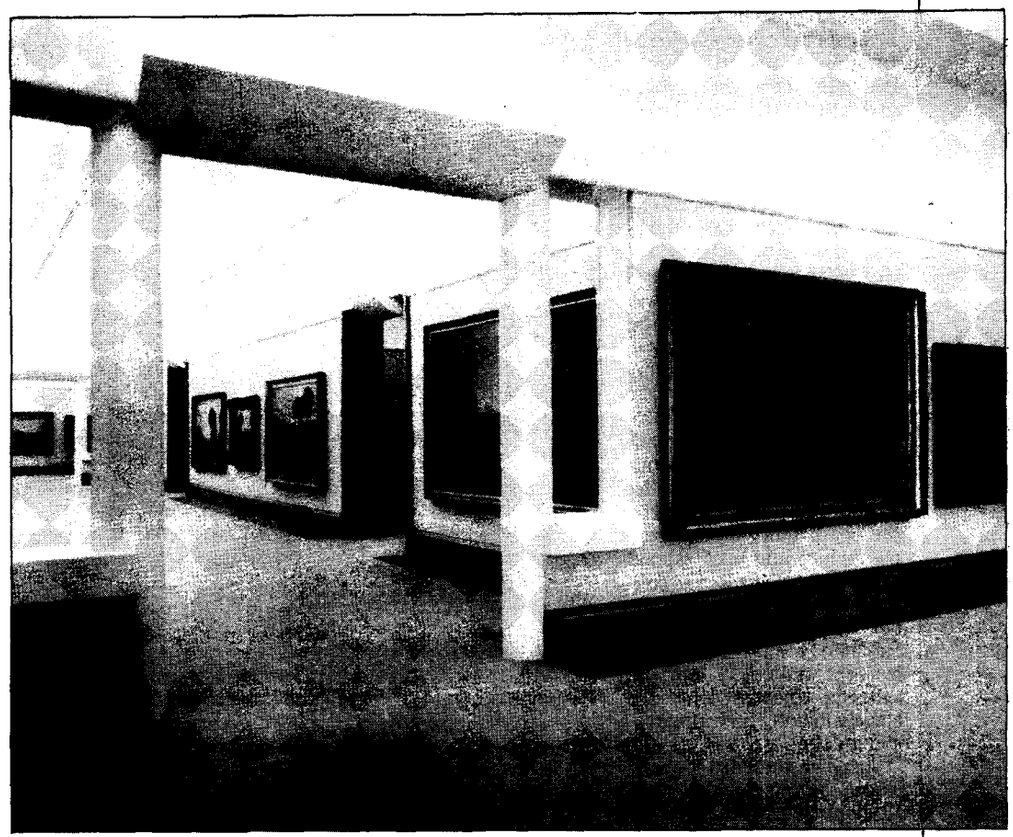
Essentially this is Don José's view of Carmen, but it is not that of the opera itself. *Carmen* is a more objective work than that. José is ruined as much as anything by his own indecision, his own inability to break loose from the habits of conformity which tie him to the army and keep him from Carmen. He fatally lacks self-knowledge.

Carmen, by contrast, is a figure of absolute integrity. From beginning to end she disdains to conceal what she is and what she stands for. 'Jamais je n'ai menti', (I have never lied), she tells José in their final duet. And it is true. She did not deceive him, and when she no longer loves him she refuses to say that she does. It is he who is unable to face the bleak reality. Murdering Carmen is what he does when she finally refuses to bend to his will. She defies male authority and pays the ultimate price.

Carmen is thus one of a number of operas which feminism has forced us to rethink. Instead of the Spanish holiday postcard of gypsies and toreadors, it comes up new as a searching study of men-women relations. In *Carmen* the men, Escamillo as well as José, cling blindly to the traditional pattern, while Carmen challenges them by refusing to sacrifice her personal independence and accept the usual subordinate role. 'Free she was born, and free she will die', she tells José at the end.

Carmen is thus, beyond the picturesqueness, an opera of almost startling modernity, an opera for our times. Ironically, those early critics who denounced the work for its 'obscenity' probably understood this better than the conventional producers and audiences who have seen in it no more than a romantic melodrama. ●

Anthony Arblaster.



Joseph Turner, Britain's greatest painter, left all his work to the nation on the condition it was hung together. 130 years later, the task has finally been accomplished. The Tate Gallery has built a special extension to house the collection, named after its patron Sir Charles Clore. But what should have been a celebration has turned out to be a damp squib.

The building, designed by James Stirling, conceals itself from view. The main entrance is round the corner from that of the Tate itself. There it is revealed as the currently fashionable collage of architectural styles from all ages. So it says nothing about either Turner's own day or the 1980s.

Inside, Turner's wishes are still being flouted. He set out that his work should be hung against a red background. The red tones in the paintings would thus be muted but the variations in the blues would appear more clearly. As Turner was above all a painter of the effects of light in sky and on sea, it is a central issue. But the new gallery presents his work against a neutral cream. This asceptic environment drowns all shades of colour. Spectators lose the chance to see the paintings as they were designed to be seen.

The Clore Building confuses styles and suppresses historical reference. Turner cannot be understood as he needs to be – as part of Britain's industrial revolution in this collection. We are asked to revere rather than to question. As such, it is a fitting monument to the cold cultural climate of the 80s. ●

Nick Mirzoeff

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CHANNEL 5 CHOICE

Gorbals classics: Citizens' Company in Anna Karenina

Citizens Spectacular

'There is really no way that the Citizens' Theatre would ever want to do plays about life in high-rise flats: that would be an insult to the people who live in close proximity to our theatre, in what's left of the Gorbals, because it is not something we know about at first hand,' says Citizen artistic director Giles Havergal.

'Having said that, all Glasgow's arts organisations cannot and do not ignore the deprivation around them: we all see sub-standard housing and unemployment every day. At the same time you get this argument about arts funding – "it's either a lung machine or a play, how can you defend art under that circumstance?" That is not the choice, there is no choice – it has to be both. One is meaningless without the other.'

Although never as overtly political in his theatrical aims as Wildcat or 7:84 Scotland, Havergal is prepared to back his cultural commitment to Glasgow's citizens. There is free admission on the door for the unwaged and for pensioners (£1 if seats are prebooked); otherwise all seats are £3. 'People have already paid twice, through tax and rates, for their ticket, so we have a duty to keep the price down and balance our books.'

Citizens' productions shun 'political' observation and didacticism. *Death of a Salesman*, from their most recent season, though, was unmistakeably about the uncaring, selfish Thatcherite Britain of 1987 despite the fact that the play retained its original setting in the America of the 50s.

The reliance of the theatre on classical plays and authors (Goldoni, Goethe and Shakespeare) places an emphasis on the willingness of the audience to determine a play's contemporary social resonances. Of late it may have become too easy to applaud the Citizen solely as a spectacle, as sound and fury with greater significance only for students of theatrical form.

Havergal's regime began as an assault on all the senses: councillors swarmed in to be appalled by gory Jacobean revenge tragedies, by seminaked boys in a homo-erotic Hamlet.

Perhaps swayed by international acclaim for the 'Citz', Glasgow's Labour-dominated council now sees the theatre as an eminently respectable and marketable element within a newly-gentrified city. 'Art should be about annoying people. We haven't upset anyone for rather a long time,' says Havergal wistfully. ●

David Belcher and Mary Brennan

The Citizen's Theatre 1987-88 season, beginning in September, will present Sheridan's *School for Scandal;* Schiller's *Joan of Arc,* a re-working of his *Maid of Orleans;* and Pinter's *No Man's Land:* bookings 041-429 0022.

Right On And On Your Screen

The sort of tv the cabaret circuit normally produces is more compromise than alternative. *Young Ones* type humour may go down great in the pub; transfer it to screen, and it makes *Benny Hill* look adventurous.

The Cornerhouse is a fresh look at a weary concept. Written by cabaret veterans Christopher Eymard and Robert Llewelyn, it takes the old basics of soap and sit-com, turns them into comedy drama and puts it all into a new perspective.

All the right bits are there – the pivotal space, like the Rovers in *Coronation St* or Queen Vic in *Eastenders* – and the small, central cast with the odd stranger and unlikely events. And there's not a canned laugh, gag or studio audience in sight. But it's more (and less) than the sum of its parts.

Llewelyn and Eymard demonstrate their versatility, and take the lead roles. They write for themselves very well; their performance and radical scripts are treated with gentle sensitivity and a sharp eye. There's no sense of stale, world-weariness perhaps because they're new to tv.

'This isn't a caff, it's a hothouse of political dialogue', says Gilbert, ageing gay proprietor with a pert sense of anarchy. The stream of messages on sexuality *et al* get community broadcastish,. yet it's all handled with a fair sense of critical honesty. This is prime non-sexist, non-racist viewing, full of positive images, to the point where it's painfully right-on. There is nothing to touch it on that score (Bobby Grant may be militant, but *Brookside*'s still full of nuclear families), and it's quite a relief to have tv on your side.

Because it is such a departure from the average sit-com, it's mild agony to admit that it doesn't always work. The set is perfect, but the rest isn't so polished. It is not a glossy product; beside its nearest stablemate, *Cheers*, it looks positively downmarket. But it does have an enthusiasm and commitment to tackling issues that tv usually ignores. That *is* a bit hard to adjust to, when you're used to re-digested pap – the shiny, high-finance moralistic packages that require no chewing.

If *The Cornerhouse* was on ITV, it could be truly subversive. Since it is on Channel 4, it's a bit predictable, 'just what one comes to expect from pinkos'. Blacks, gays, women plumbers . . . whatever next? Channel 4 is not known as a centre of excellence in home produced sit-com, but with this, they have reinforced a flagging commitment to radical tv. ●

Jenny Landreth

The Cornerhouse starts on Channel 4 on Monday May 4 9:30 pm.

Soap: Dave (Robert Llewellyn) and Gilbert (Christopher Eymard)

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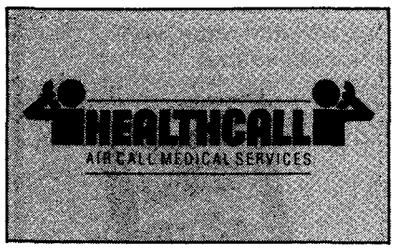


Doctor On The Line

Phone owners tired of dialling poems, cricket scores and recipes can now listen to their favourite ailment. 'Health Call' offers taped information messages on 30 medical problems to anyone with a phone and the price of the call. Although no great breakthrough in the burgeoning market of 'health' advice, it does signal a new wave of private sector initiatives.

Its originator, the Aircall organisation, already runs impressive communications centres used to contact health professionals – particularly GPs – by bleep and car radio. The idea of having a single emergency number that could be used for doctors, as well as the ambulance service was tried out by parts of the NHS, but never had a chance to catch on. Aircall have filled the gap, at least for GPs, without integrating different services through one clearing centre. Now they are looking at other gaps that state services cannot, or will not, fill.

Through Aircall an individual's phone can be turned into a remote controlled intercom with direct dialling to a message desk, for about £20 a month. With a growing number of elderly infirm people in mind, Aircall's system offers an emergency link-up for any home, upstaging purpose-built warden controlled accommodation and the limited communication networks run by some social service departments.

What next? Health Call may hint at the expansion of commercial organisations into health-dedicated information technology. Individuals are often interrogated by the health service, but rarely have a chance to do the interrogating themselves.

TV owners can page up weather and travel news, and home computer buffs can link into databases (at a price), but so far the screens have been free from medical information – particularly information organised in the logical steps of diagnosis or 'what to do now'.

American consumers can buy simple diagnostic programmes for their micros, and Britain's service industries seem likely to follow. Perhaps the NHS has something to learn? ●

Steve Iliffe

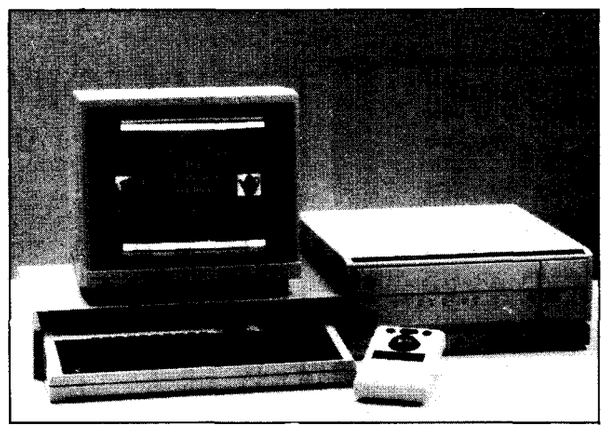
Doomsday Database

How will the archivists of the 25th century examine Thatcher's Britain? Maybe they will use the Doomsday project. The original was completed in 1086. Primarily an aid to tax gathering, it has provided an invaluable source of information on the daily lives of 11th century people.

Inspired by the tv series on the original by the popular historian Michael Wood, the BBC have commissioned another Doomsday project, notable for not only the amount of information stored (if printed, it would fill over 300 volumes) but also the latest information technology it employs.

The system is known as Advanced Interactive Video. Unlike the usual floppy or hard discs, it uses a video disc which is able to reproduce simultaneously sound, both still and moving pictures as well the usual range of textual and graphic information. For instance, call up a picture of Covent Garden in the architecture section – it will be a colour, moving picture with the sounds of the shoppers.

A wealth of detailed information gives a picture of Britain in the 1980s. The 'National' Disc divides its information into the categories of the economy, culture, society and the environment. It's possible to take 'surrogate' walks through a series of typical environments. A trackerball can explore these in minute detail – even down to the contents of drawers in the typical house!



High-tech history: Doomsday's advance interactive video

The 'Community' Disc is based on the Ordnance Survey maps. The system can go from the scale of satellite photos down to the floor plans of special sites. The tracker ball can be 'walked' along a road, stopping to request photos or information that illustrate that precise point on its journey.

The information came from a variety of sources including the population census, the Family Expenditure survey, newspaper articles, Hansard, specially commissioned essays and most importantly over 15,500 schools and community groups. They recorded statistical data, wrote on their daily lives and took photographs – a 'People's Database'?

The editorial work was done by the BBC, the technology developed in conjunction with the manufacturers Acorn and Phillips. Such a system which assembles so wide a range of information at a single source will have both educational and commercial purposes. If it is made widely available in schools and libraries, it will give everyone, not just future historians and contemporary tax gatherers, access to the details and statistics of everyday life of late 20th century Britain. ●

Martin Pople

Curtain Up!

London's West End is looking more lively and interesting than in a long time. You might think this is a reflection of the strength of commercial producers but look down the list of current shows and you'll see that most of them originated in the subsidised sector. Arts Council and Mrs Thatcher please note! We asked Nicholas Wright, associate director at the National Theatre which shows he would recommend.

Anthony and Cleopatra; the National Theatre. Antony Hopkins (also starring in King Lear) and Judi Dench take the title roles and Peter Hall directs his first Shakespeare for some time. An epic play – a Shakespearean 'must'.

The House of Bernada Alba by Garcia Lorca; Globe Theatre. A gamble that has paid off – rarely performed play brought brilliantly to life by wonderful cast, includes Glenda Jackson, Joan Plowright and Patricia Hayes. A 'lifetime' opportunity.

Yerma by Garcia Lorca; the National Theatre. Another Lorca but in a completely different starker, highlighted style.

Les Liaisons Dangereuses adapted by Christopher Hampton; Ambassadors, first rate play by British author at the height of his powers. An erotic tale of lust and its consequences!

Serious Money by Caryl Churchill; Royal Court. Incisive comedy on the world of City yuppies, Big Bang and insider dealing. Songs by Ian Dury.

High Society Directed by Richard Eyre; Victoria Palace. A classy, sumptuous musical evening of classic Cole Porter numbers.

Brighton Beach Memoirs by Neil Simon; Aldwych. Not in his usual tradition of sharp urban comedies but charming nostalgic piece on his boyhood.

Sarcophagus by Valdimir Gubareyev; The Pit, Barbican. Written by the science editor of *Pravda* on the disaster at Chernobyl. Highly critical of Soviet bureaucracy. Promoted from the top in the the USSR. Glasnost in action.

Macbeth; the Barbican. With Jonathan Pryce in the title role, fascinating to see thrilling younger actor in this classic role. Watch for the frightening, compelling performance from Sinead Cusack as Lady Macbeth.

Advance booking is necessary. For the National Theatre; tel: 01 928 2252; Barbican 01 628 8795; other West End theatres call at the SWET box office in Leicester Square; some half price seats available on the day ●

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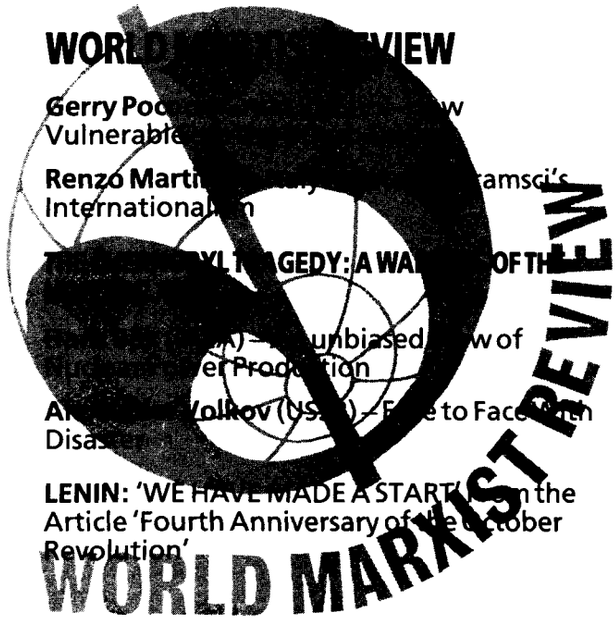

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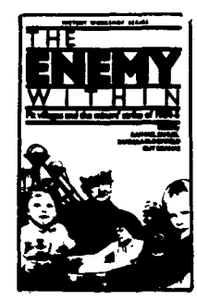

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Home Truths

Paul Johnson's **A History of the Jews** *(Weidenfeld & Nicolson £16.95)* has just been published in the same month as Ilan Halevi's book of the same name, *(Zed Press £7.95 pbk)*. These two major works examine Jewish history from Abraham to contemporary Israel, from opposing political perspectives. Johnson is a Zionist gentile; Halevi an anti-Zionist Jew and a simultaneous reading of both is certainly provocative.

Given popular contemporary left attitudes to the state of Israel, there is an expectation that Halevi's would be a simple marxist analysis. But his complex and deeply layered research yields fruitful surprises: at times, he and Johnson even agree. Both see Marx as an anti-semite and Halevi criticises him for his concept of Judaism 'as a product of bourgeois society that will disappear with it: an anti-historical *anti-marxist* (my italics) idea if ever there was one'. Lenni Brenner, on the other hand, in his recently published **Jews in America Today** *(Al Saqui Books £7.95 pbk)* makes no such critique of Marx. He sees an analysis of Marx's anti-semitic writings as 'looking down the wrong end of a telescope'. According to Brenner, Marx was unable to emancipate himself from the prejudices of his day. He called rival socialist Ferdinand Lassalle a 'Jewish nigger', 'meaning he was stubborn and stupid'. Next to Halevi's condemnation of Marx's racism, Brenner's appears apologist.

The issue of Marx's attitude to Jews is a crucial one and it should not be forgotten that Marx's own family rejected their Jewish origins and converted to Christianity. Brenner sees Marx's racism in the same way as his male chauvinism and, in Brenner's view, to judge Marx harshly for such attitudes is to read him out of context. But Halevi quotes Marx on *The Jewish Question* and by doing so reveals just how much Marx expressed the spirit of his age and much of ours. In his dissertation *The Basis of the Jewish Religion*, Marx wrote, 'What in itself was the basis of the Jewish religion? Practical needs, egoism. The monotheism of the Jew, therefore is in reality the polytheism of the many needs... money is the jealous God of Israel... The bill of exchange is the real God of the Jew. His God is only an illusory bill of exchange... The groundless law of the Jew is only a religious caricature of groundless morality and right in general, of the purely formal rites with which the world of self-interest surrounds itself'.

Halevi's history – although irritatingly phallocentric in always seeing the Jew as 'he' – questions the whole notion of *the* Jew. He criticises Marx's *single* image of the Jew and replaces it with layer upon layer of images of Jews as a plurality, many peoples from many lands. His exploration of 'Arab Jews' is a direct challenge to European stereotypical thinking of the Jew as a fragment of European civilisation.

To Halevi, the Jewish peoples are Arab Jews *and* Christian Jews; they are not the 'people-class' of leftwing ideology but a multiplicity of nations. Both he and Paul Johnson give much space to the damage done by the Spanish Inquisition and reading both authors gives an extraordinary sense of the significance of 1492 when all Jews were expelled from Spain and what this meant in terms of a fracture in Christian/Jewish culture and affection. Halevi writes from the inside and assumes some knowledge whereas Johnson's analysis always feels like the work of an outsider looking in. Johnson devotes much more space than Halevi to the way in which the Inquisition rooted out Jews and Marranos (Jews who converted to Catholicism).

Johnson also analyses the Third Reich's final solution in more depth; again Halevi assumes knowledge. To Johnson a state of Israel is a necessity for the Jews after the holocaust, but for Halevi the existence of the state is more troubling. Fiercely critical of Israel as a country of European dominance, Halevi claims the country for the Orient, for the Arab Jew and the Jewish Arab, for its survival is dependent on the commonality of these peoples rather than the white European dominance of the East European Ashkenazi élite. Halevi's Israel is for the Sephardi Jews from Spain and the Orient plus the Arabs themselves. Describing himself as a Palestinian Jew, he approves of the appointment of Palestinian Jew Yitzak Navon as president – even in Menachim Begin's government – because it helped balance the low status of the Palestinian Jew.

Halevi's sympathies are clearly with the Jews who have been in Palestine since antiquity and the recent Jewish immigrants from Arab countries. He is careful to understand the varying reasons for that Jewish immigration and he also chronicles the ever shifting attitudes towards Jews in the many Moslem communities and states. The strength of his history is his underlying critique of reductionism: he refutes any simple binary theory: Jew=Good; Zionist=Bad.

Halevi's thesis undercuts popular sloganism which equates Zionism with imperialism or Israel as a tool of the US. Johnson starts his history with Abraham's Hebron, today's West Bank/occupied territory; and by the end of the work, Abraham's people have come full circle – back to Hebron. Both analysts understand the West's ambivalent attitude to the setting up of a state of Israel and both are critical of Britain and America for refusing to allow Jewish refugees from Hitler's Germany into their own nation states.

Lenni Brenner, however, fixates on 'Zionist collusion with the Nazis' whereas Halevi observes it and Johnson does not discuss it. Halevi's concern with European Jewish white superiority over the Oriental Jewish community is that European Jews have ingested many of the racist attitudes of the host communities. He picks out the French 'Baron' Rothschild as a prime example of the colonist who came to Palestine and treated the Arabs and Oriental Jews as people to be exploited as workers. Whereas Johnson's critique of Rothschild's behaviour is a mixture of admiration and mild disapproval.

Halevi's and Johnson's two histories are an important background to the current debate on Israel. Surprisingly it is Lenni Brenner who is toughest on the PLO. 'Arafat no longer has anything to offer the Palestinian people'. He sees the present PLO as broken-backed. Halevi, on the other hand, quotes Yasser Arafat's 1974 speech from the UN podium which invited all the Jews in Palestine to stay and 'live with the Palestinians'. Three years later at an Israeli-Palestinian seminar in London. Knesset member Uri Avnery replied, 'The dreams of some are the nightmares of others.' And Halevi notes, 'Since the Israelis are not structurally a community, nor Jewish communities, but a social formation of a national type, the status of religious community protected in its civil rights within an Arab state is as unattractive in the eyes of the exploited Oriental masses as it is in the eyes of the Ashkenazi bourgeoisie'. At the root of the problem is the PLO's covenant to dismantle Israel and repatriate the Jews to their countries of origin. According to Halevi, to challenge the PLO to amend the covenant would take the risk of disrupting the Palestinian front. And so the covenant remains.

The central contemporary problem underlying this debate is the anxiety felt by assimilated diaspora Jewish socialists.

Both Halevi and Johnson begin to open up this debate but neither has yet taken on board the experience of the Jew who has ingested the knowledge of the holocaust and now finds it uncomfortable to feel at home anywhere. ●

Julia Pascal

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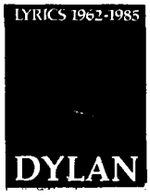

Master of Repetition

Bob Dylan – Lyrics, 1962–1985
Jonathan Cape £9.95 pbk

Bob Dylan may indeed be a central figure in the history of rock music, but this collection of his lyrics makes a faintly ridiculous book. 'His lyrics stand by themselves as poems', says the blurb on the back cover. The implication is that Dylan's words cannot stand by themselves, that his songs need to be propped up and given literary respectability. It is the other side to the story in which professors of english or music bless Dylan with their learning. In the process, professors and publishers alike conspire to do Dylan a disservice.

Dylan wrote songs, not poems. His words only come alive when sung. Take *Rainy Day Women Nos 12 & 35:*

> Well, they'll stone ya when you're walkin' long the street.
> They'll stone ya when you're tryin to keep your seat.
> They'll stone ya when you're walking on the floor.
> They'll stone ya when you're walkin' to the door . . .

Even Pam Ayres might disown it as poetry. But hear Dylan sing the same words and they tumble out, the repetition giving them a rhythm, and the sounds setting up a melody. The sense of the song is contained in the noise of the words, not just in their literal sense.

Dylan's importance was, it is true, partly due to his verbal skills which he used to open rock to new subjects, beyond those of youth and romantic love. But what is equally significant is that he rejected folk and adopted rock. Rock's immediacy and urgency gave him a setting for his words, and rock's conventions became part of his language.

It was Dylan's performance of his songs that conveyed their meaning. The words could not be separated from his voice, that strange, unsteady, nasal call. The American rock critic Greil Marcus said that Dylan sang with 'a voice that brought home menace and acceptance, terror and peace.' Dylan always inspired such hyperbole. The exaggeration captures the way his fans used that voice to personalise Dylan's songs. Dylan articulated what could not be said literally, and the words matter as much for how they are uttered as for what they say. They matter, wrote Simon Frith, 'as speech – as sounds and noises, direct signs of emotions and marks of character'. Dylan's songs are part of a conversation, not a neatly crafted literary work, and on the page they are almost meaningless as literature or music.

Lyrics, 1962–1985 does little to explain or evoke Dylan's music, but it does reveal some interesting patterns. The message songs read most easily, whether they are the protest songs of Dylan's folk apprenticeship, or the religious songs of his dotage. Where Dylan is deliberately saying something, telling us who is right and who is wrong *(Masters of War)* or telling us what is true ('God don't make no promises that He don't keep'). The lyrics make sense but the songs are dull. When there is no message, the lyrics are almost incoherent but the songs set the listener alight by simply revelling in the sound of speech and in the pleasure of communication.

Dylan's success lay in the way he captured a confused, shifting world; in the way he expressed the urge of his fans to understand, to control and to change their lives. He mixed the factual and the fanciful, the blatant and the opaque, and out of them he created a truth that was not literal, but made sense nonetheless. The politics of his music did not lie in the slogans, they lay in the way the songs fed the imagination, in the way he understood how it felt to be on your own with no direction home. It may be hard to remember now, or to discover this in reading Dylan's collected works, but the sound of those words established, as Greil Marcus would say, a conversation between people who could speak no other way. ●

John Street

Flag Waving

There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack
Paul Gilroy
Hutchinson 1987 £7.95 Pbk.

Paul Gilroy looks at the question of race and class and argues that class analysis should be substantially reworked in its encounter with race. He meticulously examines the current race literature and shows the way it submerges black populations into the white stratification system. The Left in Britain has a long history, based on the assumption that black people have no identity or needs other than as members of the working class.

Gilroy argues that class should not be regarded as a continuous historical subject which, once formed, continues its development in a linear way. Although he stresses the autonomy of black struggles, he identifies this as primarily a class struggle in black terms. It is a class struggle in and through race. Perhaps the strength of Gilroy's writing is his discussion in greater detail of the ways in which the work of Thompson, Williams and, in a different way, Hobsbawm have shaped and informed a new kind of racism on the Left in Britain.

This racism is *new* in the sense that it does not depend on the old formula, that blacks are inferior, but focuses instead on the idea of difference: this difference is found in culture rather than biology; black people by their different political cultures and institutions have a different way of life and hence a different national culture. Thus from the point of view of all those who invite us to embrace patriotism and nationalism black people become a problem because they can never be expected to give their full commitment to the British way of life.

Furthermore, the Left's preoccupation with law and order debates has failed to grasp the ways in which law-breaking is used as evidence of black people's incompatibility with Britishness. After the Falklands, many luminaries of the Left responded in a way that failed to account for the connection between nationalism and racism. Gilroy goes beyond the gaps and limits of left debate to begin to explore, as he puts it, the ways in which 'Britain has moved in the direction of a law and order society in which popular politics have infused legality with the capacity to articulate the very core of national identity'.

The section of the book which deals with anti-racism is bound to be a major controversial reference point in theoretical debates around the anti-racist initiatives of the GLC between 1981-86. The GLC's cultural politics belonged to the generation influenced by movements such as Rock Against Racism. The failings of these movements in comprehending the nature of racism found root in some of the GLC's anti-racist campaigns. Black cultural nationalists will find no joy in this either, as they come under scrutiny for their proximity to the ideologies of the new Right.

The chapter which covers the expressive culture of black Britain is probably the best kind of intellectual journalism on the subversive nature of black musics that this author has ever come across. This book will no doubt be a major contribution to the study of popular culture, and marks the beginning of a black radical tradition in Britain. ●

George Shire

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Constitutional Questions

The main radical potential of Liberal politics today lies in its libertarian approach to the powers of the British state. Some Liberals are committed, after their long years of exclusion, to opening up, decentralising, and democratising the political system. **The People's Kingdom** by *Richard Holme (Bodley Head £10.95 pbk)* presents a well-argued case for such reforms. It is a persuasive and concise tract on enhanced political citizenship.

It is stronger on programme than analysis. Britain's main problem is briefly defined as a tradition of 'paternalism', the concept of the Crown in parliament having precedence over the idea of popular sovereignty. Another theme, more familiar in Alliance rhetoric, is the damaging role of partisanship in British life. More emphasis on fraternity and cooperation would, Holme argues, make possible a better life for all.

Thus, he advocates the delegation and sharing of power, via reforms which include a Freedom of Information act, a Bill of Rights, proportional representation, formally-negotiated coalition governments, regional devolution, local government autonomy, and diffused share ownership. Social harmony should reign, presumably through the mediating agency of the Alliance parties. At this point, a relentless fight to the death seems more on the cards.

How those who now hold great power are to be made to give it up is not explained. The author has little sense of the social convulsions which have usually been the precondition for large democratic reforms. Still, these issues of democracy *are* vital, and the Liberals seem to care about them more than most one could mention. ●

Michael Rustin

Sexual Changes

As well as providing basic information about Aids, *Diane Richardson's* book **Women and the Aids crisis** *(Pandora £3.95 pbk)* provides a long overdue insight into some of the problems all women face, including lesbians, mothers, prostitutes and those caring for Aids sufferers.

Critical of the government's Aids campaign and its dismantling of the NHS, she also makes bold and welcome statements about how male sexuality (both gay and straight) makes heterosexual women more at risk. Does safer sex threaten men's sexual identity too much? How honest can men be to their lovers, wives and girlfriends about their sexual lives? How many men will happily adopt the condom?

Written for women, the book inevitably asks some uncomfortable but undoubtedly critical questions of men. 'The challenge of Aids is to create new meanings of sexuality that are not based on heterosexual intercourse or on men having more control over sexuality than women'. Whilst lacking practical suggestions to meet this challenge, Diane Richardson's book is a very welcome start. ●

Lesley Dike

Utopian Spirit

Nadine Gordimer's novels have no surface gloss. It is as if the myriad contradictions of South Africa demand a prose that is difficult and disjointed; anything easier and smoother would imply a wholeness, or truth, that could only be romantic.

Gordimer is not a romantic: she charts the confusion and compromise of white life in South Africa, and the blood and broken bodies of the black people on which that society is built. But in **A Spirit of Nature** *(Jonathan Cape £10.95)* there is a fighting utopian spirit that emerges from such alienation.

The central character, a white girl, Hillela, is an outcast and a drifter. She moves from the poverty of the South African community of exiles to the luxury of an ambassador's household; she marries a black revolutionary who is then assassinated – always there are men. Quiet, impassive, offering no explantions, it is as if the possibilities of history inscribe themselves on Hillela's body.

Gordimer offers a vision in which those possibilities come together, in which contradictions are not reconciled but are pragmatically accepted. The utopian desire of the final scene, set in a future South Africa, does not appear as a romantic dream, but as a possible and inspiring consequence of the years of struggle that lie behind it ●

Sarah Lefanu

Chemical Cocktail

Acid rain has killed thousands of lakes in Scandinavia, and more than half of West Germany's forests are dead or dying. Pollutants from power stations and vehicle exhausts now threaten human health as well. **Acid Rain** by *Fred Pearce (Penguin £3.95 pbk)* packs in a mass of facts and figures and tackles both the historical contexts of European pollution and the reasons for current political prevarication.

Manchester was the city where Britain's first Air Pollution Inspector coined the phrase 'acid rain'. Angus Smith knew about the sulphuric acid content of rain in 1851 and by 1872 had described its major effects, including building damage and destruction of vegetation.

Despite this early knowledge, sulphur emissions continued to rise until 1970. Reductions since then have been chiefly due to industrial recession rather than any effort by government. Even now, the pollution mix is changing; as the number of cars continues to grow, toxic gases like ozone become more and more important.

Acid Rain is not a scientific tome. It is a highly readable and accurate analysis that genuinely grips the reader. ●

Adam Markham

Nuclear Reaction

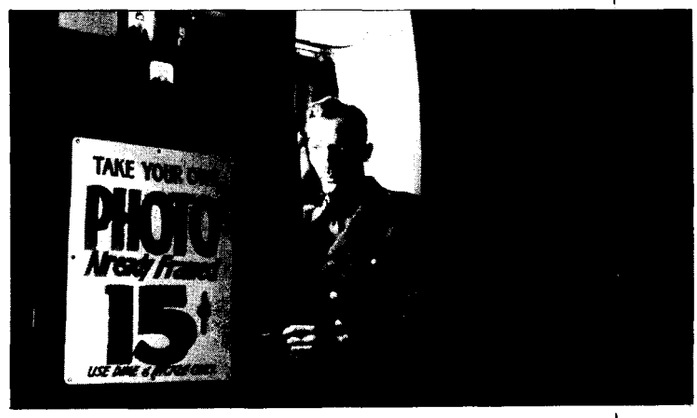
Chernobyl and Nuclear Power in the USSR by *David Marples (Macmillan £8.95 pbk)* is the first scholarly analysis of the accident and its possible impact on nuclear energy programmes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

The book presents an accurate review of post-accident measures (evacuation, decontamination, etc) and also of the shortcomings in the pre-accident programme, which saw accelerated construction of nuclear power stations. However, descriptions of the events are largely 'political' and contain very little technical, scientific, medical or environmental data that might support the main conclusion that the Soviet approach to the development of nuclear energy 'has been fundamentally unsound'.

It is argued that many aspects of the Chernobyl accident can be linked with the specifically Soviet crash programme, secrecy about previous accidents, and complete suppression of 'anti-nuclear' arguments. These 'Soviet' aspects of the disaster encouraged most Western experts and all Western governments, to make (false) assurances that nothing of this kind could happen in technologically more advanced and democratic countries.

Many major and minor accidents have occurred previously in different countries. Chernobyl is the largest but by no means an isolated accident. Its scale should change attitudes towards nuclear power not only in the Soviet Union but in the rest of the world as well. ●

Zhores Medvedev



Life During War

Let Us Now Praise Famous Women: women photographers for the US Government 1935 to 1944 by *Andrea Fisher* (Pandora £7.95 pbk) explores the work of eight women employed by the US government to photograph and record American life during the years of the post-Depression New Deal and America's entry into war. ●

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Promiscuous Davids

As the establishment press every day produces multiple reasons why their readers should not vote Labour it might have been hoped that the left press would refrain from finding another one. Eric Hobsbawm's reasoning that Labour candidates should only be supported where they are already likely to win must appear all the more odd to his fellow members of the Communist Party who all their political life have supported candidates who invariably lost.

The most odd feature of his wholesale endorsement of tactical voting is that it is offered up without a single condition. It might have been prudent at least to ask the two Davids first whether in a hung parliament they would use their pivotal strength to put the Tories out, which for Hobsbawm is the whole point of voting for them. Eric does assure us that a deal with Labour is 'the only alignment that is being seriously considered', which suggests he must know something that the rest of us do not.

To those of us not party to Eric's privileged knowledge it is only too clear that both Davids will hold hands with whichever party gives them the better chance of getting into government.

In evading a choice between Labour and Conservatives as partners and in instructing all their candidates to avoid expressing a preference, the Alliance leadership shows a shrewder understanding of their electoral support than Hobsbawm. Those opinion polls that have bothered to consult Alliance voters which party they would support in the absence of an Alliance candidate have discovered that they split with almost arithmetic equality between Tory and Labour.

It is therefore uncharacteristically naive of Eric to aggregate Labour and Alliance support and discover a two-thirds majority against Thatcherism. It would be just as logical to aggregate the Tory and Alliance support and discover a two-thirds majority against Labour.

Which is precisely what we did discover at Greenwich, where to be sure there was a lot of tactical voting, but tactical voting to stop Labour not to defeat Thatcherism.

Nor is it possible to stifle the inherent contradictions of this tactic by reminding us that Mrs Thatcher wants to destroy the Labour Party. That is also the open objective of the Alliance, whose leadership have greeted polls temporarily pointing to an outright Thatcher victory with unconcealed glee, because for a passing period they have fulfilled their own partisan priority of replacing Labour in second place.

None of this is to say that in the event of a hung parliament we should refuse to work with the Alliance. It is my personal view that it would be a betrayal of our supporters, and therefore politically suicidal, for Labour not to take the fullest advantage it can of whatever openings are presented by the parliamentary arithmetic dealt by the next election.

However the extent to which we are successful in preserving our political priorities in any of those fraught negotiations will entirely turn on how many seats we win and how many votes are cast for Labour rather than Alliance candidates.

To the extent that Labour voters heed Eric's advice and vote Alliance they weaken our position in the subsequent negotiations on whether we end up with Labour's political programme or the Alliance's.

There is only one way for electors to maximise the prospects of seeing Labour's programme implemented and that is to vote for it. Any other course risks putting Labour and its political programme into terminal decline. The ultimate irony is that in inventing a fresh reason why electors should not vote Labour, Eric Hobsbawm is assisting in that ultimate project of Thatcherism. ●

Robin Cook

Dual Strategy

Eric Hobsbawm is right to present the possible consequences of a third Conservative election victory as a 'doomsday' imperative. A truly alarming Americanisation of British politics could be in store. And all this possible on a minority of votes! Eat your hearts out left-wing opponents of proportional representation.

However I am sceptical about Eric's tactical voting suggestion. In a by-election like Greenwich the whole weight of focused media attention makes sure that voters know the tactical options. In a general election this will not be the case. Regional and national differences and the quality of particular candidates will be more of a factor. The party which has the best chance of beating the Tories may not be that which came second in 1983.

Unlike the second ballots in French elections there will be no guidance from parties as to how their traditional supporters should vote 'tactically'. The hope of enough citizens individually working out the options and *collectively* 'using democracy sensibly' seems rather forlorn.

Certainly some Labour supporters will switch to Alliance candidates in many constituencies. As Communists know only too well, left-wing voters are always under heavy pressure from the electoral system to vote to keep out the Tory, rather than for policies they may support. What seems much less likely is that under the same pressure any number of Alliance supporters will transfer to Labour.

As Eric points out, the Alliance is an 'anti-Tory phenomenon'. It is also an anti-Labour one. Regarding the Alliance as only being a 'negative unity of not wanting to belong to the Right or Left' may be underestimating the determination of many of its supporters to pursue a 'third' way.

What is coming home to roost is Labour's persistent refusal to regard the Alliance as a 'real' party, and by implication its supporters as people they must work with and win. Each time the millions attracted by Alliance politics are regarded as dupes of the media, closet Tories, or followers of a party with 'no politics', so too are their concerns dismissed.

As well as preventing a third term for Thatcherism, the Left must also be concerned with the longer term renewal of the labour movement. Any national tactical voting campaign might in many constituencies, and perhaps nationally, reduce Labour to the third place party, and also fail to ditch the Tories. If this happened disintegration could be very rapid, without the prospect of power to hold together the different trends.

What is the alternative? Labour has to operate a dual approach, common in life, but apparently less so in parliament – namely to have a maximum objective, but also to create the conditions for a 'fall back' option. From the heartening fact that the Thatcher government 'has about two thirds of the people against it' we should go full tilt for a Labour victory and, in a few constituencies, sizeable Communist votes for politics that point the way to future renewal. Nor should we accept the usual pre-election attempts to distance Labour from any form of mass struggle.

At the same time Labour must begin to treat the Alliance as if it exists, and acknowledge that some of its policies are worthy of serious consideration. This could mean that in the event of a hung parliament a Labour-led anti-Thatcher coalition might emerge. Far from undermining their chances in the pursuit of an outright victory, such an approach is likely to enhance Labour's attraction to those millions of people to whom stopping Thatcher is more important than active enthusiasm for Labour's policies. ●

Dave Cook

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End Of An Era

From the pitiless logic of Eric Hobsbawm's case for tactical voting at the coming general election, I see no escape. We have arrived at a turning-point in British political history. If a third Conservative government under Mrs Thatcher takes power with yet another absolute majority of seats, then her project of removing socialism from the scene will cease to be an arrogant stroke of oratory and will acquire a real possibility of achievement.

It still seems unlikely that the Alliance can overtake Labour in terms of seats. But the Alliance may well break through into the zone where our grotesque electoral system grants it at last a representation in parliament which begins to approximate to its national vote.

If this does take place, the credibility barrier will have fallen, and at the following general election the Labour Party would face from the Alliance the most dangerous challenge in its entire history. I would add, though, that this danger will be created even if tactical voting or a swing of opinion does evict Mrs Thatcher this year and produces a hung parliament with a greatly increased Alliance contingent.

Labour, as readers of *Marxism Today* are well aware, is exposed to withering firepower as it crosses the open ground separating a class party – which Labour can no longer be with any serious hope of winning undivided power – from the position of a socialist party dominating a hegemonic coalition of radical social forces across the class spectrum. But Mrs Thatcher is ahead in this hegemony game, and if she wins a third term, Labour's journey to new positions may become impossible.

The real force of the call to tactical voting, however, will be less concern for the fate of Labour than the simple imperative to 'get the woman out', no matter what political constellation arrives in government to replace her. What are the chances of a strong response to this call?

No support can be expected from the main party leaderships. Labour, especially, will not dare to devalue its machismo by admitting that it is extremely unlikely to win outright. There is a suicidal concept of political integrity which lays down that you vote for what you believe in, and *basta*!

Scotland has a double importance here. A vote against Mrs Thatcher is also a vote against the only party opposing devolution. The Tories govern Scotland through the Scottish ministries with only 15% of the seats. All but one of these 21 seats are held on a minority vote, and in theory tactical voting could render Scotland Tory-free. Such a result would challenge Mrs Thatcher to send English Tory MPs to govern an entirely hostile territory.

I cannot believe that even she would dare to commit such a provocation. Scottish devolution of some kind would follow. This would grant Labour an inestimable new chance, available to the opposition in federal countries like West Germany but denied in centralised Britain: to prove its fitness for London government by its record in Scottish subgovernment in Edinburgh.

To vote tactically, as Hobsbawm says, is in effect to admit that a new political epoch has opened. As he says, even if it works it will not be a moment for socialists to open the champagne. It would mark the beginning of the end of the old political system, of absolute majorities, of the first-past-the-post electoral system. It would lead towards Centre-Left coalitions, and towards devolution for the component nations and regions of Britain. This state would become a more constitutional, modern, 'republican' structure. But, in the end, that is good news for Labour. The institutions of an *ancien régime* are to prevent the victory of democratic socialism, and to drug its imagination. ●

Neal Ascherson

Uncharted Waters

Charlie Leadbeater deserves congratulations for his piece on the new divisions in the labour force. He is surely right to say that they pose deep problems for both the political and industrial wings of the labour movement, and that these problems must be addressed now. If his piece was weaker on cure than it was on diagnosis, that merely reflects the low level of debate in the movement on this crucial issue.

In my opinion, we cannot rely on organising and representing core workers only – the underlying strategy of the hard Right of the trade union movement. That would be wrong in principle, because it would mean abandoning a large and growing group of working people – mainly women, and disproportionately young and black. And it would be wrong in practice, because the core group of workers will show a continuing tendency to shrink in size, and will always be vulnerable to being undermined by the peripheral groups.

So we must try to organise and represent all workers. But that is not going to be easy. First, we have to determine the political and industrial principles on which we will recruit in the periphery, and second we have to make the deep changes that will be necessary to make unions attractive to new groups of workers. The TGWU has made a start down that road with its 'Link-Up Campaign'.

Because much of the peripheral workforce will be in part-time and temporary jobs, we are concentrating on recruiting and representing these workers in our campaign. Politically the message is a simple one – that part-time workers deserve full-time rights, and temporary workers deserve permanent rights. That political message, which is one of simple justice, has considerable resonance, and offers us another chance to win a political battle with the Tory government over its attack on individual employment rights.

Cashing the message in terms of industrial priorities is not so easy, but we have made a start with a 'charter' of six principles for part-timers and temporaries, around which we will campaign politically, and negotiate industrially. The six principles are: fair pay; full legal rights; health and safety protection; quality training; equal opportunities; and real job chances for young people.

It is possible for us to advance these principles, in part, by reviewing collective agreements with industries and firms where we are already organised. In essence, we will not oppose 'flexibility'; rather we will negotiate it so that employers pay a fair price for its introduction. To take the campaign into new workplaces will be more difficult, and will involve considerable practical changes, from the work of our officers and lay representatives to the style and look of our offices. I would not pretend that the union has always been sensitive to the needs and wishes of women, black workers or young people. But we are not going to shirk that challenge.

So the TGWU, at any rate, is trying to deal with the problems Charlie Leadbeater identifies. In doing so, we will not abandon our traditional areas of strength, in construction, manufacturing and so on. Nor will we give up the principles of solidarity on which we were founded.

Of course, our campaign will face opposition, from government and employers, and from those trade unionists on both the Right and the Left who are tied to a more traditional approach. And it will not solve all the problems of a divided labour market. But I do believe that the campaign is a major step in the right direction. The future of the TGWU may well depend on its success. ●

Bill Morris

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UPDATE

MAYFEST

Glasgow's fifth Mayfest brings together performers from all over the world in an unrivalled month of theatre, music and performance. Miles better indeed!

The Sleep
A Brechtian-style mix of song, opera and dance tells the story of Rose, aged 20, plunged into catatonia – a private dream state in which she remained for 40 years. Stars Sarah-Jane Morris.
☛Mitchell Theatre, May 4–May 8. Tel: 041 552 5961.

Bufaplanetes
The British premiere for Pep Bou, conjurer, clown and mime artist from Barcelona who amazes with his coloured soap bubbles which he juggles, makes smoke and bounces.
☛Mitchell Theatre, May 22 and 23. Tel: 041 552 5961.

Dalian Acrobat Troupe of China
The 52 members of this internationally acclaimed troupe perform Double Dragon Dances, Handstands on Chairs and Revolving Meteors.
☛King's Theatre, May 5–May 9. Tel: 041 552 5961.

The Gorbals Story
The 7:84 company revive the story of life in the Gorbals in the 1940s with all its humour, passion, warmth and savagery. Directed by David Hayman, this production is a tribute to the strength of Glasgow people.
☛Citizens' Theatre, May 6–May 23. Tel: 041 429 0022.

Ra Ra Zoo
A Circus Comedy Theatre performance with lunatic juggling, aerial dance, heartbreaking plate-spinning and more.
☛Tron Theatre, May 19–May 23. Tel: 041 552 4267.

Dick Gaughan
A performance from one of Scotland's best known singer-songwriters who combines traditional and modern songs with his renowned interpretation of traditional instrumental music.
☛Theatre Royal, May 3. Tel: 041 332 9000.

Sophiatown
The Junction Avenue Theatre Company from South Africa tell the story of the destruction of Sophiatown, one of the centres of urban African culture, after the National Party came to power in 1948.
☛Jordanhill College of Education. May 7–May 16. Tel: 041 552 5961.

Zydeco Ceilidh Band
From original songs and traditional tunes, to the infectious rhythms of Cajun and Zydeco music – a new blend of Scottish entertainment.
☛Glasgow Arts centre, May 12. Tel: 041 221 4526.

Constructed Narratives
Photographs by Calum Colvin and Ron O'Donnell, bringing together motifs from painting and sculpture. Their large-scale colour photographs display the detritus of human existence in set, but humorous, tableaux.
☛Glasgow Arts Centre, May 2–May 23.

For further information on these and the many other events taking place, contact the Mayfest Office. Tel 041 221 4911.

NEWS

The Cave of Harmony
The May Day holiday sees the launch of the first London weekly women's cabaret. It will draw its bills from the alternative cabaret world and the 'women's' circuit.
☛Mondays from May 4 at the King's Head Theatre, 115 Upper St, London N1.

Coal In Crisis
A pamphlet produced by two members of the NUM as a contribution to democracy in the union. It is 'not written in a sectarian or factional spirit' but seeks to be a contribution to the debate.
☛Available from John Chapman, 28 Foster St, Stawfoot, Barnsley.

Georgian State Dance Company
Following a sell-out tour two years ago, the Georgian dancers are back for a national tour from May to July. The dances include sword throwing and sabre wheeling. Costumes have been designed by the Bolshoi Ballet.
☛Details 029 573 684.

Nicaragua's Economy Under Fire
A talk by Trevor Evans of the Conference of Socialist Economists, recently returned from Nicaragua, on the state of the economy.
☛7.30 May 18, 23 Bevenden St, London N1.

Marxism Today
As the magazine continues to expand so does the need for volunteers. You will be involved in every area of the magazine – or create your own!
☛Details from Jane Critchley or Mark Perryman. Tel: 01-608 0265.

Local Elections
40 Communist candidates are contesting the May 7 local elections. Help is particularly needed in East Anglia, Nottingham, South Yorkshire and South Wales.
☛Details Dave Cook, 16 St John Street, London EC1M 4AY. Tel: 01-251 4406.

CP Policy Statements
Two new statements, available free, on 'Phasing Out Nuclear Power' and 'A Strategy to Tackle Britain's Economic Crisis' from the Communist Party.
☛Details enclosing SAE, CP Publicity Dept, 16 St John Street, London EC1M 4AY.

EVENTS

Back from the USSR
Members of the Communist Party's recent delegation to the USSR are available to speak at local meetings. To book a speaker and for details of the help that is available to make the meeting a great success
☛contact Margaret Woddis, 16 St John Street, London EC1M 4AY. Tel: 01-251 4406.

CND March
A year after Chernobyl, CND is planning a mass rally.
☛Details: Meet April 25 at 2pm, Hyde Park, London or tel: 01-250 4010 for information about regional marches to London.

HOUSING CRISIS

One of the Thatcher government's most destructive achievements has been to plunge Britain into a housing crisis of unprecedented severity. Information and activity from:

Housing Britain
There are half a million construction workers on the dole. Meanwhile Britain has over 100,000 homeless and a housing repair bill of £54 billion. Shelter has launched a campaign to put housing on the politicial agenda in election year called *Housing Britain – Let's Get to Work*.
☛Shelter, 88 Old St, London EC1V. Tel: 01-252 0202.

The Great Housing Benefit Robbery
This new report from the Low Pay Unit points out that the low paid will lose twice as much money from the cut in housing benefit as they gain from tax cuts. Meanwhile mortage tax relief has increased by £21.43 billion in the last four years – more than a third of which has gone to the richest 2% of taxpayers.
☛Details available from Low Pay Unit, £1.50, 9 Upper Berkeley St, London W1.

The Widening Gap
A new report emphasises that the growing divide in Britain today is that between rich and poor not simply North and South. It shows that whilst 1m people are on council house waiting lists, 116,000 council homes had been sold by 1985.
☛Available from Labour Research Department, 78 Blackfriars Rd., London SE1.

Our Homes Ourselves
1987 is International Year for the Shelter of the Homeless – the year to put women on the housing agenda. This international conference for women only provides a unique opportunity to meet and talk about what has been done and what can be done. It will provide a forum for emphasising the importance of women's direct experience.
☛Registration and details from Helen Garner, 88 Old St, London EC1V.

POETRY LIVE

A celebration of poetry is being held from May 5–15. Some highlights:

George Barker
Barker gives a reading to mark the publication of his *Collected Poems*.
☛May 7, National Poetry Centre, 21 Earls Court Sq, SW5.

Waterloo Station
The station concourse is the site for appearances from poets such as Gavin Ewart, Craig Raine, Joolz, Fleur Adcock, Maureen Duffy, Mahmood Jamal and many more.
☛May 5-7 between 5 and 7pm.

Poets International
The main event of the week featuring the recently released Russian poet Irina Ratushinskaya and the Caribbean poet Edward Kamau Brathwaite. Plus many others.
☛May 12, Royal Albert Hall. Tel: 01-589 9465.

Entries for the June Update should be sent to the office by May 1. For information: tel Nick Mirzoeff on 01-673 3450. Please try to ensure you give details of disabled access.

CONTRIBUTORS

This month's contributors include:

Jonathan Steele is the chief foreign correspondent of *The Guardian*.
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Kathryn Harriss is a member of the lesbian group of the Legislation for Lesbian and Gay Rights Campaign.
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Bill Morris is deputy general secretary of the TGWU.
Nicci Gerrard is co-editor of *Women's Review*.

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LEFT IN LOVE

The cheapest heart search in the country. Entries last for 2 issues. 40p a word.

● **Left in Love:** Socialist, working-class, intelligent woman, mid-30s, interests books, travel, cinema, dining out and people, seeks male friend-lover with similar tastes and values. Box 067.

● **Attractive guy**, mid 30's seeks direction from woman guide 25/35, destination happy honest relationship – Brighton. Box 068.

● **Left,** alive but languishing, in Lancashire. Bad film-going habit; noisy, soulful, eclectic taste in music. Attractive young chap (Just 32) seeks female warmth, waywardness and wellbeing. (Photo and tel. if poss.) Box 069.

● **Tall,** slim, good-looking male 40, sociology graduate, sensitive, artistic, quite muscular, vigorous, very solvent, into creative gardening, craft, going to Cuba, seeks friendly sensual woman for caring relationship. Unskinny build preferred. Interest in children preferred. Living North London/Herts border. Box 070.

● **Fellow 25,** needs socialist fellowette for gigantically rewarding conversation, encouragement, amusement, friendship etc. Brum, West Midlands. Box 071.

● **Socialist,** working-class, intelligent woman, mid 30s, interests books, travel, cinema, dining out, people, seeks male friend/lover with similar tastes and values. Box 072.

● **Attractive guy,** mid 30s, seeks direction from woman guide 25/35, destination happy, honest relationship – Brighton. Box 073.

● **Anarchistically inclined** 55 yr old male, full time student socio-political issues, other interests back-pack wanderings, self-development therapies, vegetarianism, fringe theatre. Good-looking, vital, currently missing out on loving and being loved, wishes meet woman similar inclinations. London area. Box 074.

● **Left in and out.** Male 34, single, Irish, working class. Likes music, travel, Chaplin, sport, rambling and honesty. would-be poet, other half, militant, happy; none of these nearly. Seeks socialist lady, who enjoys the ups and accepts the downs, for friendly relationship. London area. Box 075.

● **39 year old woman** with spirit and tenderness seeks single man with intuition, verve, and warmth. Unsupported father welcome. London area. Box 076.

● **Clark Kent like creature** on Tyneside seeks a female with a brain for relationship. Box 077.

● **Young** S.E. London gay guy searching for good-looking black guy for close relationship. My interests: clubbing, politics, running, cinema, etc., Give it a try. Photo appreciated. ALA. Box 078.

● **New job,** new area, male looking for new woman friends, new intellectual and physical stimuli. I enjoy films, concerts, running, mountaineering, literature, etc. I am a very fit 39. Kendal based, can travel. Box 079.

● **30 year old,** middle eastern origin, marxist, extremely understanding, not very outgoing but could be convinced. Looking for a loving, kind and stable relationship. Box 080.

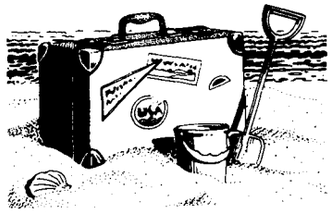
● **Hot horny dude** seeks similar for safe adventures. Ancient instincts, but fresh approach from East London radical skinhead. Any nationality, or either sex, but no Timotei look-alikes. Box 081.

● **Goil likes ghoul.** Gramsci, groundnuts and big goolies, all advantages. Box 082.

ACCOMMODATION

● **Clays Lane** is a large, multi-racial, single person housing co-op looking for new members. Welcome gays, heteros, lesbians and all creeds. Write: membership Secretary c/o 11, Taylor Court, Clays Lane Housing Co-op, Clays Lane, Stratford, London E15 2EL, including S.A.E.

● **Young guy** – left but totally consumerist domestically – seeks share in East End. Pref Isle of Dogs. Tel: 01 515 7260.



HOLIDAYS

● **Latin America?** Couple leaving in May/June 1987 for long journey through Peru, Brazil, seeking independent travelling companions Box Travel M1

● **Mountains Southern Spain.** Explore glorious countryside and moorish towns on bike, horse, minibus, train. Relax at converted watermill with pool. Molina del Santo, 29 Lordswood W Road, Southampton. 0703 768851.

● **Journey Latin America** Low cost flights, holiday journeys, 3-6 weeks. JLA, 16 Devonshire Road, London W4 2HD. 01-747 3108.

● **Brighton.** Send S.A.E. for weekend activities programme and details of ideal conference/meeting place. Sleeps 17+ Cheap and cheerful with all facilities. TOAL-Con, 39 St Aubyns, Hove, BN3 2TH (0273) 24739.

● **Nepal & Tibet** Trekking adventures led by Sherpa Co-operative, for individuals, families, mixed or women's groups. SAE Adventure Trekking, 40 Queens Park Court, Edinburgh, EH8 7DX.

● **Slow Walks/Camping Holidays** in the Eastern Pyrenees. Roger and Annie Clark, Rue du Sola, 66360 Serdinya, France (01035) 68970759.

● **Walking by Coach.** Long distance. Paths and rambling holidays with coach support, accommodation in youth hostels or hotel. Brochure from Bob-a-long (T), 34 Upper Park Road, St Leonards on Sea, East Sussex TN37 6SL. Tel: 0424-435308.

LEFT AT PLAY

For activity which doesn't involve placards, party membership drives, and religious fervour. We'll keep your activity updated for a year, after initial entry, at half price! 40p a word.

● **Prince of Wales,** Brixton. Everyone here. Weather great. The odd fight, and lots of cruising. But hope the holiday mood keeps up.

● **BAD . . .** funk nights in The Sanctuary at Heaven on Friday nights. Only £4. M.T. club-goers, mainly gay but mixed.

LEFT AT WORK

M.T.'s own Y.T.S.?

● **Experienced journalist** seeks work for lefty groups. Cheap rates for good, punchy copy. 041-632 6501.

● **South Wales – Partner Wanted:** Challenging post in Glyncorrwg, West Glamorgan to replace outgoing partner in 2-doctor practice; from mid-Autumn. Teaching and research orientated practice with own computer and A4 records; Attached staff with full range of usual equipment. MRC unit based in practice with outgoing partner, Dr J.T. Hart, continuing as research registrar. Some general practice experience is desirable as incoming partner will be functioning single-handed. Immediate financial parity with 12 month probationary period. Apply with curriculum vitae and three referees to: Dr B. Gibbons MRCGP, 39 Villiers Road, Blaengwynfi, Port Talbot, West Glamorgan, SA13 3TH.

JOB VACANCY

West of England CP
District Secretary
Apply in writing or phone for a chat
Ian Jackson, 10 Lawford Street, Bristol 2
Tel: Bristol 558726

● **Red Stockings** – Manchester-based women's theatre company need pianist. Driver essential. Details Liz Pugh 061 434 8014.

FOR SALE

● **Hammer and sickle jumpers.** Black cotton with red motif. Loose fitting. S.M.L. £24.99 plus £1.50 p+p. Jill Setterington, Softwear Knitted Garments, 6 Ashville View, Leeds, LS6 1LT. Tel: 0532 788837.

● **Genuine Stock clearance.** Sale: 25% plus off. South Essex Bookshop. 335 ley Street, Ilford, Saturday.

● **Eat The Rich T-shirts,** £5.99 inc., Red/White, c/o 176 Victoria Park Rd, London E9.

CYCLES

● **Brixton Cycle . . . Co-op.** Open 6 days a week 10-6. Ritzy end of Coldharbour Lane. new and used cycles, fast repairs. Large range of accessories and special offers. 433 Coldharbour Lane, SW9. 01-733 6055.

● **Mosquito Bikes.** For sales, spares and fast repairs; and very friendly staff. A workers co-operative, no less. Phone 01-249 7915.

BOOKSELLERS

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● ***Collets International Shop,*** 129-131 Charing Cross Rd, London WC2H 0EQ. Tel: 01-734 0782/3.
British books, journals and pamphlets: fiction, languages (incl. EFL), politics, economics, social sciences, labour, trade union and peace movement. Literature, teaching aids, travel, art books, sheet music and records from the USSR and Eastern Europe. Folk records and songbooks. Political posters, badges, cards and T-Shirts.

● **Collets Penguin Bookshop,** 64-66 Charing Cross Rd, London WC2H 0BD. Tel: 01-836 6306. Most Penguins, Pelicans in print. Secondhand section. Social science, reference, travel, cookery books, the best of modern fiction from other publishers.

● **Collets Chinese Bookshop,** 40 Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3PJ. Tel: 01-580 7538.
Books in Chinese and English from and about China. Chinese language aids. Oriental art books. Traditional Chinese embroideries, antiques, prints, jewellery, porcelain and embroideries.

● **Bookmarks,** 265 Seven Sisters Rd, N4. North London's leading socialist bookshop. Two floors of good books and pamphlets.

● **Central Books,** 37 Grays Inn Road, WC1. Large selection of books on Marxism, Feminism, Third World, Industrial Relations, Politics, Fiction. Also a selection of second-hand books, posters, cards, badges and a mail-order service. Tel: 01-242 6166.

● **Books on Socialism** and labour movement. 2nd hand list available for s.a.e. from Northern Herald Books, c/o 6 Edmund St., Bradford 5.

● **Key Books, Birmingham** 25 Essex Street, B5 4TR (corner of Inge Street, behind the Hippodrome). Marxism, Feminism, Peace, Black Studies, Magazines, open Monday-Saturday 10.00-5.30pm.

● **For a list** of radical bookshops in Britain send s.a.e. to: **Federation of Radical Booksellers,** c/o Housmans, 5 Caledonian Road, London, N1 9DX.

PUBLICATIONS

● **Radical Scotland.** Scotland's top political magazine, bi-monthly. 70p. 40pp. Socialism; radicalism; Home Rule. Annual subscriptions £5.40. From 48 The Pleasance, Edinburgh, EH8 9TJ.

PUBLISHERS

● **Socialist Publisher.** Cheap, professional publishing service. Author-financed booklets (poetry, political pamphlets, etc.) to a high quality. Coventry 23128.

SERVICES

● **Socialist solicitor** can provide range of legal services at fair rate for his labour. Lloyd Tucker. Nottingham (0602) 256532/297463.

● **Buzz Builders** (common ownership Co.). General building repairs. We specialise in loft and studio conversions. Business number now 01 674 701 2.

● **Word-processing for writers.** Fast – professional. £2.50 per 1000 words. Business services also. Tel: 0202 37743 (24 hrs).

● **Carpentry,** decorating in the London area. Good rates, free estimate. Chris 01-720 0260 eves/weekends.

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● **Typesetting & Design in any language.** For our FREE 'Guide to Publishing' contact LWC, 25 Ardleigh Road, London N1 4HS or ring (Southend 0702) 79218.

● **Socialist Interior** and exterior decorator. Top quality, good rates, free estimate. London area. Ring Clive 01-735 4012.

FITNESS

● **Bodybuilding.** The psychological benefits can outweigh the physical ones. Generate confidence and a sense of physical control. Stretch yourself. Its for everyone. We offer home courses for all ages and both sexes; including full fitness programmes with exercise diagrams – one, two or three month courses available. Send cheque or postal order for £5, £6 or £7 respectively, plus 50p postage to MRC Fitness Studio Ltd. 83 New Street, Dalry, Ayrshire, KA24 5BY.

REMOVALS

● **Women's moves.** Reliable, friendly, *professional moves. Free quotes:* 01-733 3519 or 400 8446.

CONFERENCES

● **Need a venue** for your meeting/conference? Special rates for charities/educational groups. Comprehensive, economical facilities in WC1. Meeting rooms, catering and bars, audio-visual. Contact Amanda Rumley, University of London union, Malet Street, London WC1. 01-580 9551.

EVENTS

● **Lewisham Nicaragua Support Group.** Saturday May 9th. A day of education and discussion, workshops, music, video, exhibitions. Creche and food provided. 10am till 4pm at The Lee Centre, 1 Aislibie Rd, Lewisham. Contact 692 5089.

● **Lincoln Festival/Marxism Today Event:** "Do we need a cultural revolution?" Tricia Davis talk/discussion, May 15th. 7.30pm. Studio Cafe.

● **Levellers day,** May 16th, Burford, Oxford, Oxon. 10am-6pm. Dennis Skinner/A.N.C./Roger Woddis. Workshops on William Morris, etc. Folk Concert. Tickets WEA, Oxford 735360 – £3.50.

EATING OUT

● **Orexi Restaurant.** Greek Food to Take Away. Fully Licensed for parties. Recommended by many M.T. Readers Groups. 236 Hornsey Road, London N7 7LL. Telephone 01/607 7098.

LESBIAN & GAY

● **Lesbian and Gay readers.** Send s.a.e. for booklists to Box M.T., Lavendar Menace Bookshops, 11a Forth Street, Edinburgh, EH1 3LE.

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● **Therapy:** Psycho-politics? Psycho-analysis study group. Central London. Box T001.

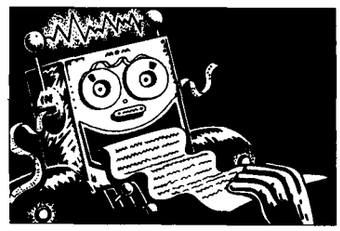
MESSAGES

● **Hungarian.** 40, history teacher visiting London in August: "I'd like to visit the London monuments and the British Museum. I'll be taking language lessons and need someone to talk to in the afternoons. Guide and companions *would be perfect."* Write to Andras Vasarhelyi, 4400 Nyiregyhaza, Koranyi Fr u. 44., Hungary.

● **Glasgow University:** Congratulations on voting for Winnie.

● **Congratulations:** Sally and Harry on the arrival of THE BILL.

● **Congratulations:** *Sally* Townsend and Harry Fletcher, on the birth of their son, William, from all at C.P. H.Q.



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MARXISM TODAY EVENTS

Marxism Today events are now being planned all over Britain. If you would like advice on how to mount one in your town or college then write to us at Marxism Today (Events), 16 St John Street, London EC1M 4AY. Same address for our readers groups – want to discuss this issue with open-minded non-sectarian friends? Then just enquire how to set up a group; or where your nearest one is.

● **Glasgow:** Marxism Today Discussion group presents "The Impending Crisis of the Scottish Left". Speakers include Edinburgh Labour Councillor, George Kerevan and SNP National Executive member Isabel Lindsay. At the Volunteer Centre, Elm Bank Street, Glasgow G2, Wednesday May 6, 7.30pm. Further details from Charlie, (041) 339 4422.

● **South Croydon:** Marxism Today Discussion Group recently formed. First meeting on Wednesday May 20, 8pm. For details, phone Glenn (01) 680 0072.

● **Islington:** Marxism Today presents "Breaking Out". A Day Event about sexual politics, to be held on Saturday June 20th (please note change of date). If you'd be interested in helping contact Jonathan Rutherford, Tel: (01) 272 4756.

● **Birmingham:** Britain's second city is now preparing for its second Left Unlimited style event. To be held on Saturday October 17th, help is particularly needed with organising workshops and debates. Like to make the big time? Contact Brum Unlimited, 25 Essex St Birmingham 5.

● **North London:** Women-only MT Readers Group. Contact Sioned on 01 965 7482 or 01 609 4218.

● **Kensington and Chelsea:** Monthly discussions held on Marxism Today articles. Next meeting on Wednesday May 6, 8pm at 42c Lancaster Rd, London W11. Further details from Brian Nicholls, Tel: (01) 229 7456.

● **Teeside:** New group recently formed, for details of forthcoming activities contact: Andy Croft, 13 Emerson Avenue, Middlesborough, Cleveland TS5 7QW.

● **Bath:** Left Unlimited now being planned for the Autumn. If you would like to help please contact Nick Breakwell, 75 Eastwood, The University, Calverton Down, Bath.

● **Plymouth:** Cornwall Left Unlimited now being planned for the Autumn. If you would like to help contact Jeremy Tedway c/o Marxism Today, 16 St John Street, London EC1M 4AY.

● **St Albans.** Gramsci Today, an event organised by St Albans Communist Party in association with Marxism Today, on Saturday October 31, at St Albans Town Hall. Further details from Sid Foggerty, 364 London Rd, St Albans, Tel: (0727) 23677.

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Further Enquiries and late copy: telephone Malcolm 01-608 0265. Box Number entries and replies are strictly confidential. Mark entries 'Left in Love' or 'Left at Play', and replies with the appropriate Box No. on the envelope. Please enclose a stamp for postage costs.

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Glenys Kinnock

Being a political wife must be one of the hardest roles – especially for someone like Glenys Kinnock, passionate espouser of causes, moderate but unswerving feminist.

The first glare of publicity put the spotlight on her 'assets': the warmly-smiling and elegantly-attractive woman with 'heather blue eyes and trim figure', who is, according to one reporter, 'on the brink of Dynasty and Dallas glamour', and to another more obviously hostile one, 'the rose that hides Labour's thorn'. But even the row over who cooks the Kinnocks' breakfast or washes up conceals a deeper unease: the British seem to retain a suspicion that a husband who respects his wife's judgement is subservient to her.

Domestic equality signals a more threatening kind of independence whereby Neil Kinnock is the weak and verbose husband, stiffened in resolve and driven in ambition by his glamorous and dominating wife.

This is a peculiarly double-edged misrepresentation. Glenys Kinnock is simultaneously seen as powerfully harmful and domestically trivial – a wilfully misogynist transformation of a woman who has always been direct, frank and friendly with the public and the press.

'Glenys Kinnock's appeal lies in this determined ordinariness and her emphasis upon those of her characteristics which she shares with millions of other women'

Glenys Kinnock's reaction to Edwina Currie's attack on her ('Who is the real leader of the Labour Party?') is striking: first she regretted that it was a woman who had made the trivialising criticism; then she insisted upon her right to speak out, commenting that 'it is bothering that an MP or a minister could suggest that you have to be a member of parliament in order to have an opinion or to campaign for issues that concern you. I speak as an individual who is political and as a wife and a mother.'

Glenys Kinnock's appeal and great strength lies in this determined ordinariness and her emphasis upon those of her characteristics which she shares with millions of other women. She copes with her prominence by remaining her own person, speaking on the issues that she cares about with her own voice. 'I only take on the things which are of a special interest to me; the things which millions of women like me are concerned about... health, education, the problems of looking after elderly or disabled relatives.'

She grew up in Wales in a political household. Her father, a railroad signalman, was an active trade unionist; when she met her future husband she had already been a member of CND and the Labour Party for several years. And amid all of Labour's stumbling, shambling embarrassments over its more contentious policies, she has remained a committed peace campaigner, supporting the Greenham Common women when Neil Kinnock is sliding away from the word 'unilateralism'.

But she insists that she is not, as some people suggest, more radical than Neil: she too detests Militant Tendency (while being 'more interested in what the children at school are reading than in Militant'); she rejects what she calls 'ideological feminism' (while objecting to Neil's 'rugby vocabulary').

During her years as wife of the leader of the opposition, Glenys Kinnock has learned to deal with the glare of publicity, controlling her directness but remaining warm and at ease. She is not, however, a natural self-publicist, avoiding numerous interview requests and refusing to play the self-advertisement game purely for the sake of Labour's image.

Chris Davies/Network

Glenys Kinnock: an unthreatening and accessible socialist

Active on behalf of One World – the pressure group for a radical approach to famine – she refuses to wield her status for its advancement. When Labour's charter for the Third World was launched, she stayed well out of the limelight. And recently in Truro she waited until the ranks of cameramen had faded away before taking up the pose that all tv editors would have loved: crawling on the floor while playing with a toddler.

Her socialism seems moral and gut-felt yet also unthreatening and accessible, revolving around issues of social justice rather than philosophies of social change. Similarly, her feminism is mild, humanitarian and non-combative: 'I define feminism as accepting that, because of their sex, women have a less fair deal'. She and Neil in many ways embody that most bland and palliative of traditions, the nuclear family, with their two children, their sacrosanct Sundays and their secure loyalty.

Glenys Kinnock is seen by many as the Labour Party's 'greatest asset' but this implies that she is an object. She is, always and demonstrably, her own subject. Certainly, however, she helps her husband. Unlike Mary Wilson, who met Harold when he was an academic and longed for the peace she only found in writing poetry, she relishes politics. But her ambitions are neither personal nor manipulative, for she is firmly committed to creating a socialist society.

In spite of the odds she remains optimistic, although never utopian. Like Neil, she dismisses what she sees as the vain visions of those who prefer purity to power. She believes, against the odds, that there is now a will to win, and it is winning that is essential: 'It is meaningless talking without power.' ●

Nicci Gerrard

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